

COODEN BEACH GOLF CLUB
THE FIRST 75 YEARS



1912 - 1987

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1912 - 1987

Jethro Arscott

THE OLD ORDER CHANGETH

MODERN TIMES

Bexhill Museum
No. L1547 b

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

In writing this book I have been shown much kindness. Without exception my every request has been met with a ready and willing response.

In particular I wish to thank the following who have helped in widely differing ways: Peter Bathurst, Stella Bellem and the Bexhill Museum, the Bexhill Branch of the East Sussex County Library, Gordon Bishop, A. W. "Bill" Bossom, Madeleine Brooke, Vera Butler, John Colclough, Geoffrey Cotterell, Earl De La Warr, John Dowling and the *Bexhill-on-Sea Observer*, Peter Evenden, Peter Fynmore, *Golf Illustrated*, *Golf Monthly*, Pamela Grant, Aylwin Guilmant, Pamela Haines and the Hastings Reference Library, Jean Hardwick, Cyril Hewetson and Walton Heath Golf Club, E. "Ted" Hollands, John Hughes, Desmond Loyd, Michael Martin, John Milton, the late Winifred Pearse, Frank Proctor and British Rail Southern Region, Simon Puttock, Charles Robertson, Robin Robson, George Scott, Ron Southall, Philip Truett, Hugh Waters, Rosemary Watford, West Sussex Record Office.

The late L. J. Bartley's *The Story of Bexhill* and Aylwin Guilmant's *Bexhill-on-Sea - A Pictorial History* have proved invaluable books of reference.

I have tried to contact all copyright holders, but in cases where I may have failed I apologise in advance and will be pleased to make the necessary arrangements.

Finally, I salute my daughter Ann. Without her enthusiasm and expertise this little book would not have seen the light of day.

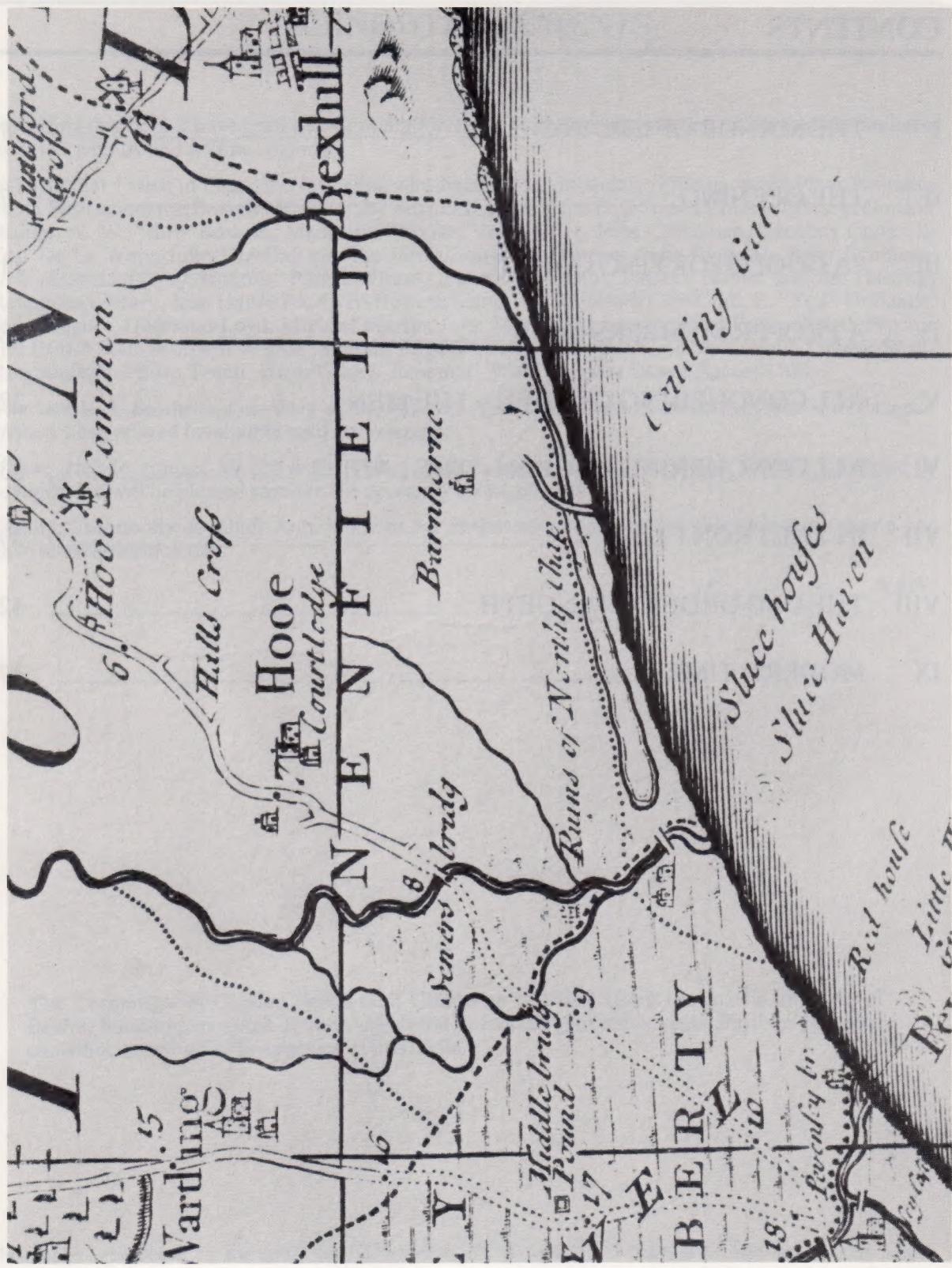
A.J.A.

The Committee of Cooden Beach Golf Club wish to thank Gaby Hardwicke, the firm of Bexhill Solicitors in which Jethro Arscott has been active for many years, for their generous contribution towards the expenses of this book.

The trophy reproduced on the cover was presented by G. B. and H. P. Coghlan in memory of their father H. Granville Coghlan, the first captain. The Club's colours also shown were designed for wear as a necktie by Randal G. Kincaid in 1929.

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An enlarged section of Budgen's map of Sussex.

I THE MANOR OF CODING

For the genesis of Cooden Beach Golf Club the story of Noah and the waters that covered the earth is a more appropriate allegory than that of Adam and Eve in the garden of Eden. Early in the 18th century when golfers had long been disporting themselves on Blackheath, the site of the Cooden Beach golf course was suitable only for aquatic pursuits. According to Budgen's map of Sussex engraved in 1724 it was a lagoon.

The present golf course lies at the eastern end of what are properly called Pevensey Levels. This part of Sussex has undergone repeated changes since the beginning of time. The submerged forest under the sea off Herbrand Walk probably dates from the great storms of the 13th century. Even in this century many acres of land in the same vicinity have been lost to the sea. All know that Pevensey Marsh is steeped in history, but not everyone appreciates what a watery place it once was.

In his book *Hailsham and its Environs* Charles A. Robertson writes: "When long ago the Romans established themselves at Pevensey, then much later when the Normans repaired the old Roman Walls and built their Castle after the defeat of King Harold, the marsh as we now know it was a vast expanse of inland water. There was usually enough depth to enable boats to moor at Hooe, Wartling, Herstmonceux, Boreham and even within a short distance of Hailsham It was an area of over fourteen square miles that during many centuries was to see constant change. The dominating influence inevitably being the long coast line on which the shingle beach moved often with devastating effect before a constantly beating sea."

On the eastern side of these waters near Barnhorn Hill and but a short distance from the present golf course, there stood the ancient port of Northeye until it was demolished by the great storms and floods in the 13th century. Peter Brandon in *The Sussex Landscape* sets the scene: "The site of Northeye, a limb of the Cinque Port of Hastings, is recalled to memory by the local field-names of Town Field and Chapel Field and by traces of its main street and foundations of some of its buildings. Even so it is hard to visualise its battered sea wall, the noisy taverns, its chapel crowning the hill, ships at

anchor, the excited cries of gulls and all the sights and smells of a once busy harbour."

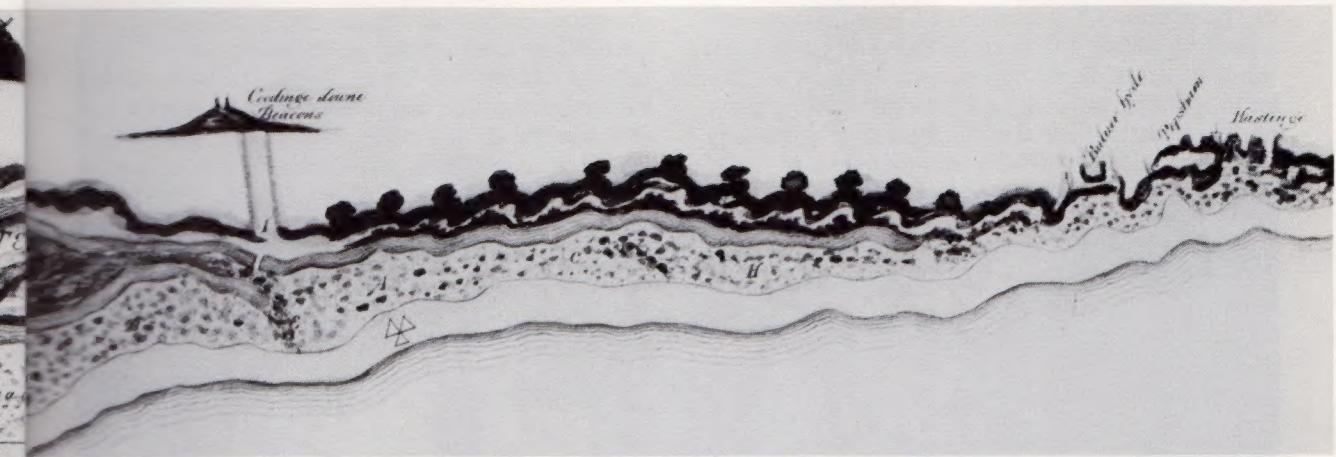
The original town of Northeye in the vicinity of Upper Barnhorn Farm was replaced by a village of the same name which sprang up on the "eye" or low hill known as Chapel Field west of the 11th hole on the golf course. This second Northeye was in turn succeeded by a hamlet originally known as "the Sluice" centred round the sluice house - now the Star Inn.

Over the centuries as land has been reclaimed, the black soggy earth, which in other parts of Pevensey Marsh has turned into rich pastures for sheep, has on the golf course provided firm and close-knit turf with a peaty sub-soil. Even today some parts of the golf course are no more than level with the sea as was evidenced by sea water flooding the 13th hole as recently as Easter 1985. The fact that the golf course has been created out of wetlands recovered from the Marsh may sometimes disappoint the winter golfers, but it means that in a dry summer the natural fairway lies cannot be bettered anywhere in the kingdom.

The first known reference to Cooden is contained in a 13th century document. "William of Hastings, Lord of Northei granted to the Abbey of Battle a right to drain their lands through his Manor of Northei between the lands of the Priory of Hasting close by the old sewer of Codyng." The records of Battle Abbey show that Count Robert of Eu, Lord of the Rape of Hastings granted to John de Coding the land which we know today as Cooden. Sometime before the 14th century the Coding family built a moated house of which only the moat remains. This can be found behind the house called "Friars Charm" in Maple Walk but is a sad sight because concrete tank traps were dumped in it after the Second War and have never been cleared away.

An accurate description of this part of the coast is contained in the survey of the Coast of Sussex made in 1587 when the Spanish Armada threatened: "From hence (i.e. Borne now Eastbourne) to Fayre lee poynte being xij migles is all alongste good landinge uppon the Beach, but they cannot entre into the lande partly for Marshes, partly for Marsh and highe Lande together, and laste for highe cliffes, but must of





Extract from the survey of the Coast of Sussex made in 1587.

necessite march along the Sea except agaynst Coodinge Downe Beacon at where with some intrenchinge and flanckers yt may be garded." The accompanying map shows a road down to the sea corresponding with the present Cooden Sea Road.

In an old 18th century map of Sussex, Cowding Gate is shown – Gate meaning a gap or gateway down to the sea (compare Ramsgate and Margate in the Isle of Thanet). Other spellings include Codyneshaven, Codingele, Codyngge, Cowding, Codingdune, Codyngton and Cowden Gate. On at least one 18th century map it appears as Cowdung. This intelligence may not best please those who regard a number on the Cooden telephone exchange as adding to the value of their desirable residences.

Ownership of the Manor of Coding passed to St. Stephen's College at Westminster¹ sometime after 1470 and the Coding family died out early in the 16th century. In 1549 the Manor was acquired by Sir Richard Sackville; thus began the long association with the Sackville family. Shortly after that time the Manor of Coding was absorbed into the Manor of Bexhill and has descended with it ever since. In 1821 the Sackville family was united by marriage with the De La Warr family.

In 1883 the 7th Earl De La Warr built the East Parade at Bexhill and laid his plans for the development of an exclusive and very superior seaside resort. There was to be nothing vulgar like piers or cockle stalls at Bexhill. Only the most discerning and well-bred were to be encouraged to take up residence or have their holidays in such a genteel watering place. These plans were completed by his son Gilbert George Reginald who succeeded to the title as the 8th Earl at the age of twenty-six in 1896. Whilst the

development of Bexhill was the result of the endeavours of both father and son, it was the 8th Earl who was in every sense the sole founder of Cooden Beach Golf Club and the first promoter of the residential development that surrounds it.

It is difficult to visualise now the isolation and the remoteness of Cooden in 1891 when the 8th Earl, then Viscount Cantelupe, married and decided to make his home in Bexhill. A rough old cart track known as Sea Lane followed the line of Cooden Sea Road from the village of Little Common, formerly known as Slyder's Common. Between Cooden Mount² and the railway the only buildings to be found were the cottage where the forecourt to Cooden Beach railway station now stands and those at Cooden Farm. The buildings at Cooden Farm were on the north and east sides of the Golf Club courtyard, comprising today trolley sheds, the professional's shop, garages and Mrs. Eva Stroud's cottage³ (then two small cottages). On the east side of Sea Lane stood the farmhouse (now Golf Lodge occupied in 1987 by Robert and Joey Mitchell).

South of the railway, at the back of the site on which Westbourne Court now stands, were Kewhurst coastguard station and a pair of coastguard cottages. This coastguard station had replaced the signalling station at Kewhurst House on Little Common Road between St. Mark's Church and the Denbigh Hotel; hence the name "Kewhurst", sometimes on old maps spelt "Cowhurst". The only other building south of the railway was a very large barn standing on the site of the present Cooden Resort Hotel. In earlier times this had been used for the grinding of corn by oxen⁴. The adjoining field was known as "Sea Barn Field".

These were the only buildings; going east



Looking north up Cooden Sea Road showing what is now Golf Lodge with the Men's Convalescent Home in the distance, c.1910.

across the farmland south of the railway (some of it pretty boggy) one reached Wickham Avenue before finding the next house. After turning west Sea Lane continued as it had done for many years on its way to the Sluice (not yet Normans Bay) but followed a very different route from the present day Herbrand Walk. When the railway line from Lewes to Hastings was opened in 1846 the embankment on which the track was laid was certainly not within a few feet of the shingle as it is today. A century ago in the vicinity of the hotel and the present houses in Herbrand Walk there were fields between the railway and the sea large enough to accommodate a Sunday school outing cricket match. The road at that time ran south of the present front gardens of the Herbrand Walk houses.

In 1892 the newly-wed Viscount Cantelupe moved to the Manor House in Bexhill Old Town. His wife was the Hon. Muriel Brassey, daughter of the first Baron (later Earl) Brassey of Normanhurst Court at Catsfield and granddaughter of Thomas Brassey the famous railway contractor.

On any basis, Viscount Cantelupe must have been a most engaging character. He lived for only forty-six years, but during those years he lived life to the full. He was an enthusiast, a man of many interests and keen to embrace new ideas. Later he went too far too fast with some of his business ventures, overstretched himself and



The 8th Earl De La Warr – the founder.

twice became involved in bankruptcy proceedings. He was received as a local hero in 1900 on his triumphant return from the South African war where he had been a war correspondent for the *Globe* newspaper. The 8th Earl was the prime mover in obtaining the Charter of Incorporation for the Borough of Bexhill in 1902 and, although not a word ever appeared in the local papers his divorce caused a last minute crisis in the choice of the first Mayor for the new Borough and the Earl was passed over. The civic dignitaries made amends the following year.

The Earl was a man with keen sporting interests. He entertained the South African and Australian cricketers in matches on his private ground. One of his abiding interests was motor racing and he was responsible for the first motor races in England being held along the East and De La Warr Parades at Bexhill.

The Earl first became involved with Cooden through the "Kewhurst Golf Links" – the course that never was. The intention was to provide a new site for the course of the Bexhill Golf Club which had been opened in 1891 on land also owned by the De La Warr family at the eastern end of the town. The first captain of the Bexhill Golf Club was none other than the eminent Mr. A. J. Balfour, later Prime Minister. To start with the course at Bexhill was a modest one of nine holes criss-crossing between the end of Cantelupe Road and the top of Galley Hill. Although by the end of the 19th century a further nine holes had been added on land north of the railway, the course was cramped for space and was fast becoming ripe building land.

As early as 1894 the Bexhill Club were contemplating a new and larger course. After looking at ground at The Pages, the Club encouraged by the Earl settled on the site of the present Cooden course. The secretary of the Bexhill Golf Club told the *Bexhill Chronicle* in January 1899: "We have marked out the course at Kewhurst. It will be eighteen very interesting holes and a good long course". The Bexhill Golf Club's professional was Douglas Rolland, the famous golfer and phenomenally long driver from Elie. Rolland and H. S. Colt advised on the layout. Dr. H. A. MacDougall the captain told members of the Bexhill Golf Club at their annual meeting in 1899: "I do not suppose we shall go for another eighteen months or two years. To begin with there is no communication and for another there is a clubhouse to be built."

The plans had been laid on the assumption that the tramway would be extended to the present Cooden roundabout and also that the

Earl would build a new hotel at Cooden and then lease it to the proprietors of the Sackville Hotel. The new hotel was to include a spacious club-room. The tramway was delayed and no hotel was built in Cooden until well after the First War. Meanwhile the Bexhill Golf Club prospered – in 1902 there were 2,163 visitors – and the members decided that they preferred to stay where they were. Their major concern was that the Club had no security of tenure. In April 1902 the *Bexhill Chronicle* commented: "Everyone will recognise the sacrifice the Earl will be making in granting any fixed tenure to the Club, having regard to the value of the highly favourable building estate that the links occupy. This is all the more appreciated bearing in mind how the Kewhurst Golf Links have so far failed. His Lordship has spent a great deal of money there and took time by the forelock." The Earl made "the great sacrifice" and granted the Bexhill Golf Club a seven year lease, so ending all possibility of that Club moving to the west.

When trains first stopped at Cooden in 1905 not only had "the projected Golf Links not been carried out" but in the words of the *Bexhill-on-Sea Observer* Cooden was a "wilderness"⁵. In that year a motor train service started between St. Leonards and Eastbourne. Halts were provided at Collington, Cooden, Normans Bay, Pevensey Bay and Pevensey and Westham. There was also a halt at Glyne gap but this was closed after some years. This motor train service continued until electrification in 1935. The present Cooden Beach railway station replaced Cooden Halt, originally called "Cooden Golf Halt". The name for the halt was significant because it settled once and for ever the name of the district as Cooden and not Kewhurst.

It was to be another seven years before golf came to Cooden. The decision of the railway company to incorporate the word "Golf" in the name of this desolate halt was therefore nothing less than prophetic, especially as before reverting to the idea of a golf course the Earl had plans for a motor race track. This was to run between Cooden and Pevensey with a total length of more than seven miles. There exists a delightful sketch prepared in 1906 by the National Motor Course Company which shows an enormous grandstand complete with dome and flag flying above it, occupying pretty much the site of the present practice ground on the golf course. In fact, the site at Brooklands in Surrey was preferred for this motor track which was indeed a blessing for golfers.

In July 1906 the tramway company at last

extended the tram service across the fields to Cooden. Both Cooden Drive, opened for vehicular traffic in 1914, and De La Warr Road follow the line of the original tram routes and

this is why they are so straight. In their early days these roads were a delight both to speed merchants and to the constabulary trying to trap them.



This reproduction shows the proposed motor track between Cooden and Pevensey, a scheme put forward in 1906.



This sketch gives an idea of the motor track and buildings suggested in a National Motor Course Company scheme in 1906.

1. St. Stephen's Chapel was the first meeting place of the House of Commons.
2. Cooden Mount is now the area of Coverdale Avenue and Grazebrook Close. The house of that name with its distinctive glass tower was demolished early in 1986.
3. Throughout references to "the cottage" mean this one.
4. As late as 1933 Nelson Spray of Birchington Cottage, Little Common recalled in the *Bexhill-on-Sea Observer* that as a young man he had used oxen for ploughing on what is now the golf course. Indeed "Old Nell" as he was called remembered the names of all the oxen who made up his team – Lark, Linnet, Luck, Fortune, Duke and Diamond.
5. There is a myth still commonly held that, when the railway was first laid out across land belonging to the Sackville family, there was a requirement for all trains to stop at Cooden. The plain fact is that there was no halt at Cooden until nearly sixty years after the line was opened.

II THE OPENING

The first meeting of the directors of Cooden Beach Golf Club Company Limited was held at 7 Cantelupe Road, Bexhill on the 24th February 1912 with the Earl in the Chair. This, the first of three limited companies which have been involved in the ownership and administration of the Club, was a proprietary Club initially owned and controlled by the Earl. The company held the course and buildings as tenants of the De La Warr family who owned the freehold.

There were also present at that meeting C. H. Bennett, Herbert Fowler, A. A. Messer and Major S. F. Wright Warren. Mr. Bennett lived in the appropriately named "First House" in Clavering Walk (the Earl's second wife was Miss Hilda Clavering). His firm Messrs Bennett and Ferris were appointed solicitors to the new company and Mr. Bennett was also the local agent of the De La Warr estate for the sale of plots at Cooden. Until his death in 1929 there was no one who had a greater influence in the affairs of the Club. Very much the elder statesman, it is apparent that little was done without the seal of his approval.

Herbert Fowler was the architect of the golf course and for a few months served as managing director. He properly belongs to Walton Heath and their *Story* has this to say about him:

"Herbert Fowler was a big man in every way; over 6 feet tall and weighing over 14 stone; a big hitting cricketer and a fierce striker of a golf ball. When he designed golf courses he designed them on a big scale. He had come late to golf. He played cricket for Essex, Somersetshire and the M.C.C. and not until 1891, when he was already 35, did he take up golf seriously

In 1902 the golfing journalists were acclaiming a 'record score' he had put up at St. Andrews, equalling the 71 of Willie Auchterlonie over the left hand or reverse course - 'a better score than ever amateur has managed in the past'. In England, Gold Medals at Royal St. George's, Westward Ho! and Walton Heath were among his achievements

From all accounts, Fowler was an experimental golfer testing every theory in practice. At one time he was trying small balls for which he had a special press made; at another he was trying short clubs, to be followed by 'very long and powerful ones which he used with a sweeping



W. Herbert Fowler – from the painting in the clubhouse at Walton Heath.

style'. He used unpolished steel heads to his irons to avoid being distracted by the glint of bright metal on the back swing. He putted with a wooden mallet described by one writer as 'looking like a sandwich-box with a stick stuck through its middle'. But at critics of his rusty clubs and weather-beaten wooden putter, he could afford to smile.

Fowler deplored the tendency towards four-ball games which he considered did nothing but harm to a player's golf and at the first opportunity he struck a blow for foursomes by instituting with his fellow directors of Walton Heath the London Foursomes."

It would have warmed his heart to know that seventy-five years on the foursomes tradition at Cooden is still strongly entrenched.

Mr. Messer's firm of Tubbs and Messer were the architects responsible for drawing up the plans of the new clubhouse. Like Mr. Bennett, Mr. Messer was actively concerned with the management of the Club until his death twenty years later. Major Wright Warren was appointed the first secretary. Although involved in one way or another with the Club for many years to come, he was also keenly interested in the Lawn Tennis and Croquet Club (later called the Cooden Country Club) which could be found where numbers 21 to 37 Clavering Walk now stand. Whilst its management was entrusted to the Major it was legally one entity with the Golf Club until 1929.

It was at this same meeting that the agreement with Fred Robson the professional was sealed. The directors of the new company did all the right things in promoting the new Club and they were certainly no slouches in the art of advertising. Whilst it was the railway company who changed the name of "the Sluice" to "Normans Bay" it was the 7th Earl who added "on-Sea" to "Bexhill" in 1884 and it was his son who had the masterly idea of introducing "Beach" with all its maritime associations into the title of the Golf Club.

Presumably it was Herbert Fowler who advised the Earl to engage Fred Robson as the Club's first professional. Robson had come to the fore by reaching the final of the News of the World Tournament in 1908 and taking the great J. H. Taylor to the last hole on Taylor's own course at Mid-Surrey. In his obituary on Robson, Bernard Darwin quotes Taylor's autobiography in which J. H. says: "I won the News of the World Matchplay Tournament beating in the final a tall, thin, ginger-headed young fellow from the North, named Fred Robson," and Darwin adds, "I think those few words tell just about all we in the South knew about that young man. We knew he came from Bromborough but we did not know very clearly where Bromborough was since it was four years before another fine player Miss Gladys Ravenscroft helped to make it famous. Fred was then essentially a dark horse." Four years later when he came to Cooden he was no longer a dark horse – both countries had asked him to play for them in the annual England v Scotland match. Fred Robson's fame did much to spread the name of Cooden in the golfing world and attract a number of very good amateur golfers including his pupil the same Gladys Ravenscroft.

The official opening was set for Friday the 14th June 1912. The contractor for the course

was G. A. Franks of Guildford, working to Herbert Fowler's designs. The course was ready for play in good time for the opening because Fred Robson had already been round it in 74 shots by the 25th May. It seems scarcely credible that work on the construction of the course had only begun the previous August.

The plans of the capacious purpose-built clubhouse were passed by the Bexhill Corporation's Surveyor on the 20th November 1911, and work was not fully completed by the opening date. The builders were Crosby and Co. Except for the billiard room (erected in 1928 and added to in 1931) and the smoke room built in 1965 on the south west corner, the western elevation of the clubhouse looked at from the golf course remains remarkably as it did in 1912.

Inside the clubhouse there have been countless changes in the uses to which the various rooms have been put; indeed the only rooms continually used for their initial purpose are the first floor dining room and the ladies accommodation on the ground floor at the north end of the building. For many years the secretary's office was centrally placed on the ground floor in the bay window adjoining the hall and verandah, this area now being incorporated in the mixed lounge. The remainder of what is now the mixed lounge was first used as the men's changing room, the men's club room being upstairs where the secretary's office now is. The main club room was the present bridge room. The east wing of the clubhouse was only at ground floor level, the kitchen and servants room being where the men's changing rooms now are. A lift operated by hoists was installed to take the food from the kitchen to the dining room on the first floor, but spare a thought for the poor maids who must have spent all day scampering up and down the staircase off the corridor which now leads to the men's changing rooms.

As has already been mentioned, the farm buildings on the north side of the courtyard were adapted as "garage accommodation for motors" and for the professional's shop with the flat being built above it. The present trolley sheds provided an office for the caddymaster and accommodation for the caddies and the chauffeurs. The farmhouse across the road was named "Golf Lodge" and became the home of Fred Robson. Although it never worked out, the intention was that the cottage should be occupied by the steward and the flat over the professional's shop by the greenkeeper.

So to the opening day the 14th June 1912. And what a day that must have been. The events are

Opening of Cooden Beach Golf Links, Yesterday.



H. BENNETT, Winner of the Tournament DRIVING.



J. H. JONES of the Beach B. Club.



BRAID PUTTING.

CELEBRITIES ON THE COURSE.



H. BENNETT on the right.



MAJOR WRIGHT WARREN (Secretary) greeting two of the players.



EARL DE LA WARR (center), MR. U. STRATTON (left), and BRAID (right).



MR. CYRIL MAUDE (on the left).

From the Bexhill-on-Sea Observer.

recorded fully in the supplement to the *Bexhill Chronicle* in an article written in the delightfully highflown style used by journalists at the time. The headline "All the Talent in the Golfing World visits Bexhill" was well justified because the only notable absentees were J. H. Taylor and Fred Robson who sadly was unwell.

"The scene from the clubhouse during the morning round was a very picturesque one and a good augury for future similar events. The crowd was essentially a golfing one and therefore particularly elite. The earlier arrivals were on the scene sometime before the hour of starting and as the morning advanced the general public arrived by train, tram and car. The professionals were quickly surrounded by the more enthusiastic of the spectators and those who did not know the leading players by sight were quick to enquire for Harry Vardon, J. Braid and the others."

Even allowing for the considerably increased pace at which golf was played in those days it seems scarcely believable that the field of 57,

Opening day prize winners.

The best card returned was that of Vardon. He did the round in 74, the details being:—

Out	5 4 3 5 4 5 3 4 4—37	Home	4 5 5 2 3 5 3 5—37	74
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J. Braid and P. J. Gaudin, the next best, each completed the course in 78.

Play was rendered more difficult in the afternoon by the rising wind, but otherwise the conditions continued ideal. The general public were present in even larger numbers. Vardon eventually ran out winner. His score for the second round was 79, made up as follows:—

Home	5 4 6 3 6 4 5 3 4—40	Out	6 5 3 5 4 5 2 4 5—39	79
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Braid did the course in 77. The full list of winners was later declared as under:—

	Score.	Prize.
1.—H. Vardon	153	25 £ s.
2.—J. Braid	155	20
3.—P. J. Gaudin	155	0
4.—R. Ray	160	10
5.—G. Cawkwell	160	0
6.—G. Duncan	166	10
7.—T. Ball	166	0
8.—P. Wynne	167	5
9.—J. B. Batley	168	0
10.—W. E. Reid	168	5
11.—G. H. Mayo	169	0
12.—A. F. Kettley	169	2 10
13.—G. Piper	169	2 10
14.—J. C. Lomie	170	2 10
15.—A. Mitchell	170	2 10
16.—J. G. Sherlock	170	2 10
	171	2 10

playing in pairs, and starting at five minute intervals from "about 10 o'clock" had completed before lunch which was served at 1 o'clock. The Earl had made sure that everyone of influence in the locality had been invited and they were served with luncheon in the clubhouse at a purely informal function with no speeches. Of those not privileged by such an invitation "a large number brought their refreshments and picnic parties were conspicuous everywhere". In the morning there had not been "much enthusiasm in the vocal sense" but in the afternoon

"not a little hand clapping was heard now and then".

The Earl had invited Prince Albert of Schleswig-Holstein to present the prizes but he was unable to be present and the Earl did the honours himself. The first sixteen won prizes amounting in all to £107.10.0. Harry Vardon was the winner with James Braid the runner-up.

Only one of the competitors exceeded a score of 100. The *Chronicle* concludes "It is safe to say that yesterday may be regarded as the forerunner of many more brilliant gatherings."

III "A GOOD SPORTING COURSE"

The scoring on opening day seems to have been remarkably good considering that the greens are supposed not to have been laid until the previous autumn. After the tournament the professionals were asked for their opinions. All were agreed that Cooden is "a beautiful site for golfers" but J. Randall (Sundridge Park) said: "The greens are difficult and the course long for amateurs".¹ The two golfing immortals present were a model of discretion in their comments. The reporter said that James Braid praised the course highly. What he actually said was: "It should be a good sporting course." H. Vardon was just as tactful: "If it suits Braid it suits me and Braid's opinion on a course is good enough for anybody."

There can be few golf courses which have changed less over a period of seventy-five years. It is therefore easiest to describe the original layout of the holes by reference to their design today. The comments which follow are largely based on information provided by A. W. "Bill" Bosom, who has been blessed with a remarkable memory and whose father was on the green staff from the start in 1912.

The original short 17th hole lasted no time at all. A small level piece of ground can be found on the northern side of where the present 18th fairway starts. This was the tee to the original 17th hole and the green was in the area of the present men's 18th tee. The initial 9th hole was converted in 1913 to the 9th and 10th holes shown in the sketch. In 1933 these two holes were replaced by the present 12th and 13th holes. These are the only holes which differ completely from the original layout. Nearly all the holes have been lengthened and a vast number of sand bunkers filled in, mainly for reasons of economy but in some cases because they were cross bunkers, a style of architecture now out of fashion. Mrs. Pearse (see page 33) is convinced that many of the greens were once crowned and have sunk over the years.

The 1st, 2nd and 3rd holes were substantially as at present. The 4th hole had cross bunkers and the line of play was much closer to the ditch on the left. Originally the ditch short of the green was covered with wooden boards and players were permitted to play off the boards.

The tee to the 5th hole was originally on the same side of the lateral dyke as the 4th green.

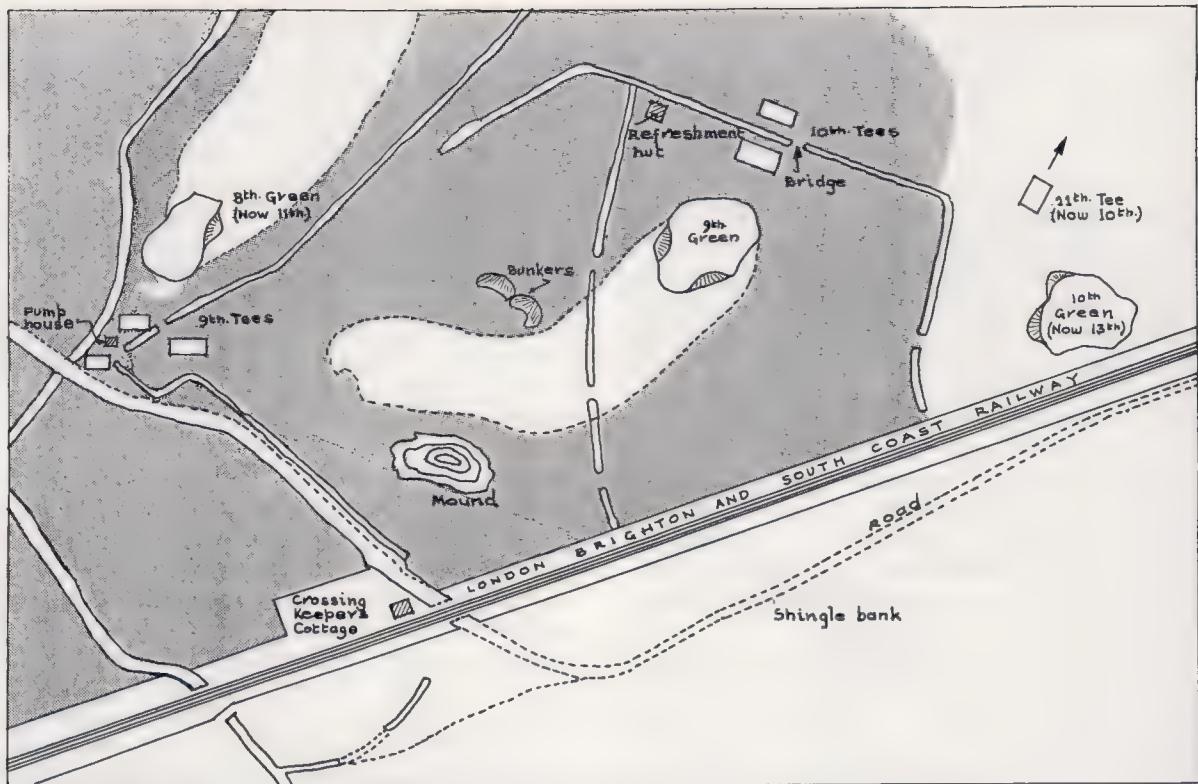
The bunker in the middle of the fairway was not constructed until after the Second War and was the brainchild of Sir Henry Birkmyre. He spent an October afternoon driving a vast number of balls at Harry Benge, the greenkeeper in order to get its siting exactly right. The 6th hole is pretty much as it always was and there can be few golf holes where the putting green is nearer the out of bounds.

The original tees for the 7th were on the left of the 6th green and this was a fiendishly difficult hole because there were bunkers on either side at both the front and the back of the green. The great Harold Hilton used to play short on purpose and then chip up.

Having completed the 7th hole, one played what is now the 11th hole as the 8th hole, (the present 10th, 8th and 9th holes being then the 11th, 12th and 13th holes). The order of play was changed before and after the Second War before it settled to its present sequence. Which order is the better can only be a matter of personal preference. The line of play for the original 8th hole (now the 11th) was much closer to the Cole Stream on the right and there were cross bunkers to be carried from the tee. A high bank used to run down the left hand side of the green.

The 9th hole was 380 yards long and was played from the area of the present tees at the 12th hole across the corner of the farmer's field, so that a good drive ended up at just about the start of the present 13th fairway. From there, with the then prevailing south-west wind (which alas seems to prevail no more), something in the order of a shot with a mashie niblick (a 7 iron we call it today) was required to a green set close to the ditch on the north side of the present 13th hole. Near the old 9th green stood a hut from which refreshment was provided by the shepherd's wife during the season.

The 10th hole was a short hole of 177 yards played to the present 13th green (which incidentally is the only completely natural green on the course). There were two bunkers right in front of it in the direct line of play. To form a general idea of the original layout it is best to look back from the present 13th green to the main dyke on the north of the 13th hole. The tees were on either side of this dyke with steps and a bridge leading from one tee to the other.



Sketch of the 9th and 10th holes laid out in 1913.

The present 10th hole (the 11th in the original layout) has not been greatly altered. Originally the cross ditch was boarded over, then it was completely open for some years before being turfed as it is now. Where the two bunkers just beyond the cross ditch were opened up a few years ago there used to be cross bunkers right across the fairway. The bunker in the left hand slope to the green was put in after the Second War.

The present 8th hole (originally the 12th) has been altered considerably. The line of the hole used to be much further away from the ditch which runs along the left side of the hole than it is today. Originally the green was short of the cross ditch. When the hole was lengthened, the cross ditch in front of the green was boarded over. Later railway sleepers were laid and covered with grass giving about twice the width of the present alley. Even the most ardent Cooden enthusiast must accept that this is not the greatest hole that ever was. It cannot be denied that it is long and flat, but one hopes that it does not warrant Henry Longhurst's condemnation of the 10th hole at Southfield. In *My Life and Soft Times* he describes it as "six hundred straight yards of absolutely damn-all" and quotes

Rex Hartley's immortal comment: "Only two clubs to play this hole with. A rifle and a spade".

The original men's tee at the 9th hole (formerly the 13th) was behind the present ladies tee. The bank on the left beyond the large pair of spectacle bunkers was completely covered with gorse. The large hole on the left of the green was created by sand being dug out for use in bunkers elsewhere on the course.

The original 14th hole bears little resemblance to the present one. It was not much more than 100 yards long, played from a tee on the mound behind the present 9th green to a green about forty yards north of the present back 15th tee. It is difficult now to envisage the hole because much soil was removed from the area of the old green in order to make the present green.

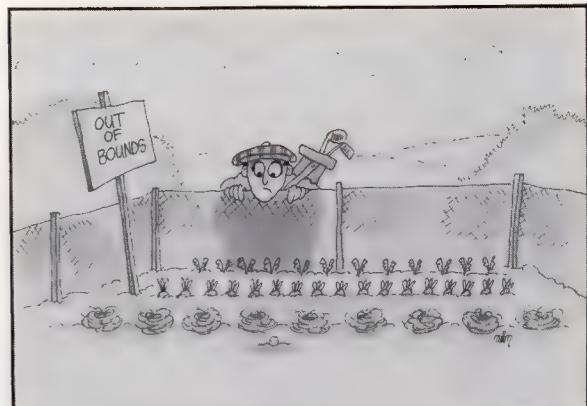
The back medal tee at the 15th and also the tee on the north of the 14th green are both comparatively recent. This hole was originally played to a double-tier green on what is now the practice ground and which has been opened up again recently for practice. The present 15th hole had cross bunkers at the bottom of the hill. When these were taken away, new bunkers were placed both left and right, short of the green. The line of play also used to be further left, nearer the ditch,

and this gave a better chance of getting up in two shots.

At the 16th hole there has been very little change except that the cross bunker has replaced a little pot bunker.

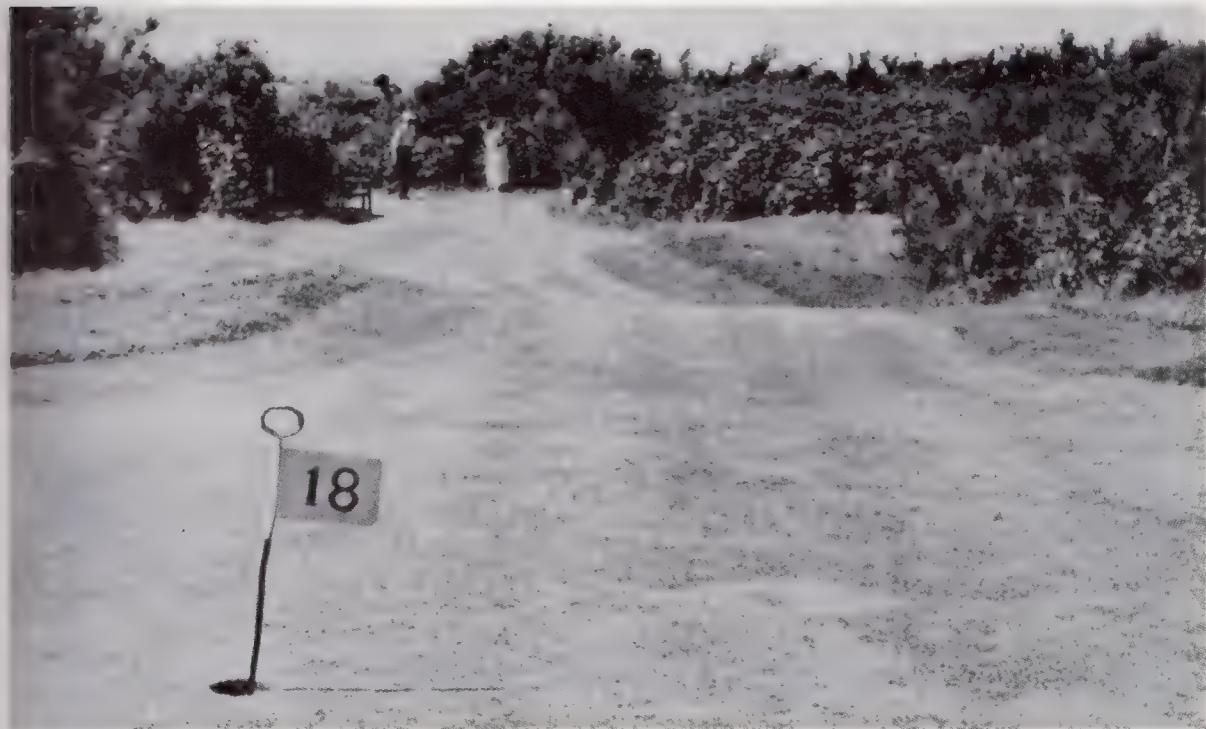
The bank in front of the 17th tee has been levelled out only recently to assist the shorter player. About three quarters of the way along the hole there used to be cross bunkers. Very substantial alterations have been made to the original 17th green. This was initially strongly kidney shaped on the left hand side and its front half was at a very much higher level than the back. The undulations in the fairway are a sure indication that this area was at one time under the plough.

The 18th hole has seen a few changes. There was at one time a wonderful back medal tee alongside the railway fence which required a carry across a pit and could prove daunting in a tight finish. Sadly this had to be abandoned for safety reasons when the track to the 10th tee came into regular use. About half way down the hole off the left hand side was a garden where vegetables were grown for the delectation of members using the dining room. This was protected by a wire fence and a local rule making it out of bounds. At the bottom of the hill there was



an extensive area of reeds (similar to those on the left of the 6th hole) which required a footbridge to get across. Sadly, when the alley was widened in 1964 the necessary drainage works killed off these reeds which really were a splendid hazard and stayed long in the memory of visitors. The original 18th green was about forty yards short of the present one and had a cross bunker right in front of it which the professionals who played on the opening day clearly did not approve of.

In 1913 work inside the clubhouse was completed and also the adaptation of the farm buildings to golf club purposes. It was also in this year that the famous 18 hole putting course situated



The 18th hole on the putting course.

in the gorsy area on the right of the 1st hole came into play. This putting course really was something. It was regarded as unique and certainly its fame spread far and wide. All the holes contained the most subtle borrows and the most fiendishly difficult of all was the blind 17th. A total of 45 strokes (2½ per hole) was regarded as pretty good going. Members had putting handicaps – Harold Hilton was of course the back marker off plus 3. Regular competitions were held. It was also a place for wagers in the cool of the evening after a drink or two. Sometimes after a particularly exhilarating dinner, matches were continued by torchlight far into the night. After the Second War when labour became more and more expensive, the condition of the putting course was allowed to deteriorate so that the green staff could concentrate on the golf course and in the end there seemed little point in keeping it. In retrospect this was a mistake.

The big event of 1913 was the opening of the Dormy House also built by Crosby and Co. It consisted of fourteen bedrooms, six bathrooms and a cosy little lounge. The directors seemed uncertain whether the Dormy House was to be for men only or whether some of the bedrooms should be available for married couples. Presumably they wanted to test the market. *Golf*

Illustrated described it as “a model of comfort without unnecessary frills” and commented on the long since defunct pond in these words: “In front of the Dormy House is a quaint little lake bordered by beds of night scented stock that fill the air with a heavenly perfume when strolling out after dinner.” The *Bexhill Chronicle* was equally grandiose. “Those who approach the course from the tramway line see the Dormy House over the placid waters of Lake Cooden – which may in time afford the golfers the diversion of an hour’s fishing in the briny, for it has been stocked with dace and perch.” Fred Robson’s son Robin cannot recall it containing anything except goldfish. The opening of the Dormy House in April 1913 was celebrated by two exhibition matches. In the morning Robson with a score of 76 beat J. H. Taylor, who had missed the opening of the Club the previous June, by one hole and in the afternoon Mr. Sidney Fry and Taylor beat Mr. Harold Hilton and Robson by 3/2. This was followed by a celebratory dinner in the evening.

Both Mr. Hilton and Mr. Fry joined the Club. Gladys Ravenscroft, the British Ladies Champion in 1912, played in the first Ladies Open Meeting held a week before the opening of the Dormy House. Miss Ravenscroft won the



The Dormy House and “lakelet”.



Match, April 1913. Harold Hilton driving watched by Robson, J. H. Taylor and Sidney Fry.



Beach Ladies' Open Golf Meeting. From left to right, Miss Ravenscroft, Lady Champion; Mrs. Lathbury, Secretary of the Ladies Club; Miss Bennett and Miss Selby Lowndes.

scratch prize with a score of 90 "and was so pleased with the course that she also promptly joined the Club." 90 may sound a lot of shots for the reigning Champion but the L.G.U. had "bestowed a par of 86 - a figure beyond which the L.G.U. thermometer refused to register."

The fact that such eminent golfers became members must have been a real stimulus for the Club's publicity. In 1913 the Sussex professionals and the Sussex ladies held meetings at Cooden and in 1914 the Sussex amateurs played the County Championship there. The Club was becoming well established both inside the county and well beyond it.

The directors therefore had much to cheer them, but the need for financial stringency meant that they had to manage in a very real sense. No one held office or served on the committee who was not acceptable to the directors. In early 1913, the ladies committee appointed Mrs. Lathbury as their hon. secretary in place of Mr. Bennett's daughter: after it was explained to the ladies that they had absolutely no power to elect a secretary and having made their point, the directors confirmed Mrs. Lathbury's appointment.

At a very important meeting of the directors held in the clubhouse on Sunday March 1st 1914, relationships between the directors and the committee were put on a proper basis. The committee's suggestions for the management of the Club were considered and the following resolution passed: "That the directors of the Club Co. hereby place the management of the clubhouse (catering and staff excepted) and course in the hands of a Committee to be annually elected by the members of the Club. That an Annual General Meeting should be held each year during Easter week. That such Committee should consist of not more than seven or less than five and the directors, their alternates and the Captain of the Club. That all candidates for membership shall be submitted to and elected by such Committee. That no alterations shall be made on the course without the approval of the Committee and that such Committee shall have power to appoint sub-Committees. The Committee to have no control whatever over the finances of the Club." So, in 130 words the first hesitant steps were taken towards democracy.

Meanwhile financial problems were gathering for the Earl and his Cooden Beach Golf Club Company Ltd. The total cost of erecting the clubhouse, converting the farm buildings, constructing the course and building the Dormy House exceeded £12,000. It seems from the

minutes of the company that shortly after the Club was opened, the need to raise £3,500 on debentures from sources outside the De La Warr family became urgent. Mr. G. A. Franks, contractor for the course, who also built the roads and sewers on the estate, accepted debentures in part payment of his account.

In September 1913 shares were issued to Mr. Henry Wheelwright Marsh. Mr. Marsh and Mr. Guggenheim replaced Mr. Bennett and Mr. Messer on the Board and the Articles of Association were altered so that the Earl did not require a share qualification. After that there were so many rapid changes of shareholders and directors that it is difficult to make out what was happening, but one is left with the firm impression that control of the company had passed from the Earl to Mr. Marsh.

Little differences began to arise between the Earl and the other directors. Without the board's authority the Earl told buyers of the building plots that they would not have to pay an entrance fee to join the Club. The Earl let the grazing on the golf course at the outbreak of war, and he had to be gently chided that it was not within his power to do so. It is also recorded that Mr. Bennett, who seems to have enjoyed throughout the confidence of all parties, had to advise the Earl in plain terms that he would be wise not to seek payment of his managing director's fees, particularly as all the principal members of the staff, including Robson and Saunders the head greenkeeper, had agreed to accept a reduction in wages at the outbreak of the war in August 1914.

When the war started, many thought that it would be over by Christmas. By early 1915 it was obvious that a long hard haul was ahead, and there was little prospect of the company's finances improving during the war. Mr. Bennett, who continued to bear the burden of the day acting as honest broker, met Mr. Cope, one of the De La Warr Estate Trustees and Mr. Marsh at the Ritz Hotel at the end of July 1915. Mr. Marsh agreed that the Company should be put into liquidation. The Earl himself was not present at that meeting having volunteered for active service and been given a temporary commission in the Royal Navy. An Extraordinary General Meeting of the shareholders of the Cooden Beach Golf Club Company Limited was held on the 6th August 1915. Mr. Bennett stated that "he had commenced proceedings for the appointment of a Receiver and Manager on behalf of Lord De La Warr in respect of the debts held in his name on behalf of the Marquissa

Vitelessci. Mr. Marsh suggested that the same person who was appointed Receiver and Manager should be the Liquidator." In order to arrange this, the meeting was adjourned for seven days. This is the last entry in the minute book.

In December 1915 the 8th Earl was taken ill

on returning to the Dardenelles campaign. He died at Messina in Sicily, aged forty-six, and was buried there with full service honours. His company might have floundered but the golf course and Club which he had founded were to flourish.



Entrance to clubhouse, 1913.

The following day the opening meeting for amateurs was held. The scratch prize was won by E. H. W. Scott with a score of 87. Herbert Fowler went round the course, which he himself had designed, in 93 to be joint runner up with T. B. C. Piggott. In 1913 an amateur, P. Taylor, holed the course in 74.

IV A PROPER MEMBERS CLUB

Herbrand Edward Dundonald Brassey, the 9th Earl De La Warr, was a boy of fifteen at Eton when his father died. This meant that complete control of the Club became vested in the De La Warr Estate Trustees who continued to run it as a proprietary Club.

The events of the next few war years are but dimly recorded. Certainly the full 18 holes remained open for play throughout the war – indeed a competition was played in August 1918. Life at Cooden during the First War was dominated by the Cooden military camp in the grounds of Cooden Mount (see page 6). In addition, a wooden hatted Red Cross Hospital was established at the western end of Clavering Walk and included the premises of the Cooden Country Club. Mr. Bennett's daughter was in charge.

The camp at Cooden will always be associated with the three battalions of the Royal Sussex Regiment raised by Lt. Col. Claude Lowther of Herstmonceux Castle. After "Lowther's lambs" as they were affectionately known went off to the front, South African batteries trained at Cooden and these were succeeded by our own artillery who included among their number H. Victor Mole, many years later president of the Club. In the last part of the war the camp was occupied by the Canadian army.

The Dormy House was occupied by Officers and while the clubhouse continued to be used by the members it also became an Officers' Mess. Knights, the steward, was instructed "to charge 9d per glass for port supplied to members and Officers except at Mess dinner when the charge was at the rate of 3/6d per bottle". The arrangements were made without much fuss and the fact that C. K. Peache, who had succeeded Major Wright Warren as Golf Club secretary, was also a Captain in "Lowther's Lambs" may have had something to do with it. There must have been some crowding of bedrooms in the Dormy House as "an allowance of 1/- per day was agreed to be made to the five Officers occupying one room".

The Club recovered remarkably quickly from the First War. Cooden was now well known as a highly desirable place to live, and the De La Warr Estate was selling building plots apace. A full programme of competitions was arranged for

COODEN BEACH GOLF CLUB.

ANNUAL MEETINGS

BETWEEN
SUSSEX AMATEUR and
SUSSEX PROFESSIONAL GOLFERS

Being now resumed, the first match since the War, will be played at

COODEN BEACH GOLF CLUB,

ON WEDNESDAY, 3rd SEPTEMBER, 1919,

Between 10 Amateurs and 10 Professionals.

SINGLES WILL BE PLAYED FROM 10 A.M.
— 4-BALL FOURSOMES FROM 1.45 P.M. —

SINGLES.

Amateurs :	Professionals :	Result.
1 Major H. D. Gillies (Rye)	v. Fred Robson (Cooden Beach)	1.....
2 H. C. Ellis (Rye)	v. A. Mitchell (St. Leonards)	2.....
3 C. J. H. Tolley (R. Eastb'n & C'den Beach).	v. C. Parsons (E. Brighton)	3.....
4 D. E. Landale (Seaford & Rye)	v. A. E. Baggs (Willington)	4.....
5 Major R. B. Vincent (Rye)	v. Jack Rowe (R. Ashdown)	5.....
6 Evan Campbell (Ashdown)	v. C. Macey (Crowborough)	6.....
7 Ernest Smith (R. Eastbourne & Rye)	v. T. Gillespie (Sexhill)	7.....
8 G. H. Peacock, do.	v. W. H. Wooller (Pyecombe)	8.....
9 W. S. Lurcott (E. Brighton)	v. A. B. Jeffery (Worthing)	9.....
10 D. F. S. Smith (Worthing)	v. H. Crook (Eastbourne Downs)	10.....

Reserve : W. Allan Powell (Cooden).

FOUR-BALL FOURSOMES.

1 (H. D. Gillies v. H. C. Ellis	(F. Robson v. A. Mitchell	1.....
2 (C. J. H. Tolley v. D. E. Landale	(C. Parsons v. A. E. Baggs	2.....
3 (R. Vincent v. Evan Campbell	(J. Rowe v. C. Macey	3.....
4 (Ernest Smith v. G. H. Peacock	(T. Gillespie v. W. H. Wooller	4.....
5 (W. S. Lurcott v. D. F. S. Smith	(A. B. Jeffery v. H. Crook	5.....

COLD LUNCHEON, 2/6 each (and Table Money 2d.),
at 12.30, 1, or 1.30.

No Luncheon Tickets can be sold at the Club after 11 a.m.

E. A. EDWARDS, *Secretary.*

1919 culminating in the match between the Sussex Amateurs and Professionals.

The Trustees could not reasonably be expected to manage the Club indefinitely and at their suggestion E. A. Edwards, the secretary, called a meeting on the 4th December 1920 of "certain members resident in the immediate neighbourhood". Mr. Bennett was of course elected to the chair and it was explained that only local members had been invited as their interests were more vitally concerned in the well being of the

Sussex Amateurs v Professionals, September 1919.



From left to right, H. C. Ellis, H. H. Hilton, Mr. Must, E. A. Edwards (secretary) and W. Allan Powell.



H. D. Gillies congratulating Fred Robson with young admirers looking on.

Club. Mr. Kerr had offered to purchase the Club for £20,000, or to lease it at £1,000 per annum. Mr. Bennett told the meeting that the Trustees would much prefer that the control of the Club should be in the hands of the members and they had decided to offer the Club a lease of the 230 acres of land, the clubhouse and premises, Robson's cottage and the Country Club for 21 years at a rent of £600, rising to £750 with an option to purchase during the first seven years for £20,000. Those present agreed to form a new company to take the lease and acquire the furniture and equipment from the Trustees at a valuation.

No time was wasted in the formation of the new company called The Cooden Beach Golf Club Limited (the word "Company" was omitted to distinguish it from the first defunct company). Anticipating C.B.G.C. Limited by more than thirty-five years, wise Mr. Bennett suggested that a company limited by guarantee should be formed, but his suggestion was not approved and the company formed had a share capital of £5,000 divided into 1,000 membership shares of £1 each and 4,000 non-cumulative preference shares of £1 each. Each member was required to take up at least one membership share and members were encouraged to take up preference shares bearing interest not exceeding 6 per cent in order to provide working capital for improvements. By August 1921, 520 members had taken up membership shares and £1,528 had been subscribed in preference shares.

Throughout the dealings, the De La Warr Estate Trustees (with Mr. W. W. S. Follett in the leading role) were extremely helpful. The Club had obtained two valuations of the furniture and equipment which they were to buy. The valuation of their own member, H. J. Howard, was £2,063 and Gordon Green and Webber's was "under £1,800". The Trustees indicated their willingness to accept £1,000 in payment and also to accept a reduced rent of £500 for the first year, rising by £50 a year to £750 per annum. But this was not acceptable to the directors and Mr. Bennett – once again the go-between – was asked to go back to the Trustees and obtain a still further reduction. This he succeeded in doing.

The Club was at that time negotiating with "the Commissioners of Sewers for the levels within the Rapes of Pevensey and Hastings" (their full title) for the right to erect a pump house and sluice gate so that the Club controlled the discharge of water from the dykes inside the golf course into the ditch on the other side of the road from the present 12th tee. The full cost of

the pump and ancillary equipment was £512 which the Trustees agreed to pay in exchange for the new company taking over the old Club's liabilities of £489.

The chairman of the new company was D. J. H. Cunnick. He had the reputation of being a peace-maker which is no bad quality for the chairman of a golf club. He was also regarded as something of a dandy and rumour had it that he wore a corset. Others actively associated in the formation of the new Club were R. S. Hunter (father of Madeleine Brooke¹), A. A. Messer the architect, P. S. Sarson (father of Winifred the Girls Champion), A. Turner Laing, J. McLaren, G. H. Peacock and J. E. Young. Turner Laing was very influential and regarded as the leader of the social life of Cooden in the years between the wars. Calling cards were still the order of the day. Turner Laing invariably wore a monocle – that sure symbol of superiority. He even kept it in his eye when striking a golf ball, but sometimes at impact it fell out. G. H. Peacock was a master at Eastbourne College and thrice won the Sussex Amateur Championship. Johnny Young, an amiable Scot, had the privilege of presenting the Championship Cup to Miss Joyce Wethered three years later. He called his house in Clavering Walk at one time "No Styrmie". When asked the reason, he explained that he kept open house: there were no obstacles to admission.

The minutes of the provisional directors meeting held on the 5th March 1921 record that "the meeting was of opinion that the Trustees had treated the Club in a most generous manner. Mr. Follett agreed to ask Earl De La Warr to become the first President of the Club." A month later the ladies secretary was asked to write to the Countess De La Warr, whom the Earl had married the previous year, inviting her to become president of the ladies section.

Formation of what is technically a new club affords a never to be repeated opportunity to be rid of undesirables. The directors decided that the prospectus and circular, setting out the new arrangements and inviting applications for one membership share to be accompanied by a cheque for £1, would not be sent to two of the members of the old proprietary Club. One of them, H. E. Fenner, issued a writ against the Trustees of the De La Warr Estate and the new company, seeking a declaration that he was entitled to be a member of the new Club. Mr. Bennett advised the directors to stand firm. Eventually Fenner's action was withdrawn and he had to pay the costs.

On the 25th June 1921 the first general meet-

ing of the new Club was held for the purpose of electing the captain and committee for the ensuing year. The directors had proposed that of the committee of twelve, not more than three should be ladies. Mr. E. A. Leach moved: "that in view of the fact that the lady members . . . had already a most efficient Captain, Committee and Secretary, this general meeting considers that it is neither necessary nor convenient for any lady to be on the Committee of general management, it being sufficient that if any question arises affecting the interests of lady members or the opinion of the ladies is required on any special point, to refer all such to the ladies Committee as a whole for advice." The motion was carried by 24 to 2 and indeed although Blanche Ireland and Evaline Jackson were directors of Cooden Beach Golf Club Ltd and Evaline Jackson was also a director of C.B.G.C. Ltd. no lady served on the general committee until Peggy Gillespie was elected in 1983.

H. Granville Coghlan and A. D. Broughton were proposed for captain and on a show of hands Mr. Coghlan was declared elected. H. G. Coghlan was the highly respected principal of Seafield School in Collington Lane and he also had the distinction of being the first captain of Highwoods Golf Club. In 1912 the 8th Earl had invited him to be the first captain of the pro-

prietary Club and now he was also the Club's first captain by the will of the members.

So, after nine years a genuine members club had been constituted. The structure adopted was somewhat cumbersome. The directors of the company were responsible for the finances of the Club and for all policy. The general committee was responsible for the day to day conduct, which it delegated to sub-committees. The handicap committee was quickly merged with the green committee and this has remained the position to this very day. In addition to the house committee there were initially an election committee and a wine committee. Besides these three tiers of authority – a board of directors, general committee, sub-committees – there was in practice a final court of appeal because no decision of real importance was taken without the prior approval of the 9th Earl. The Trustees had reserved the right for him to appoint two out of the six directors of the new company. Happily in the years that were to come the Earl took good care to exercise this right in a way which was both proper and benevolent. Despite several attempts over the years to change it, this management structure remained more or less the same until altered when John Sechiari was chairman in the 1950s.

Mrs Madeleine Brooke still enjoys playing bridge regularly in the Club which she joined in 1917. Her record of seventy years continuous membership is by any reckoning a truly wonderful achievement.

V ALL CONQUERING COODEN – THE MEN

The Golden Age for Cooden was the period between the wars, 1919–1939. First and foremost this was because of the quality of the Club's players. Pride of place must go to Harold Hilton whose name fittingly heads the winners of the Scratch Medal which he won in 1919 at the age of fifty. The Club had allotted him a handicap of plus 5¹, but he did not compete much at Cooden after winning the Scratch Medal. He used to go round with Fred Robson on Saturday afternoons carrying a few clubs in a small bag under his arm. Otherwise he played but little – he had done it all.

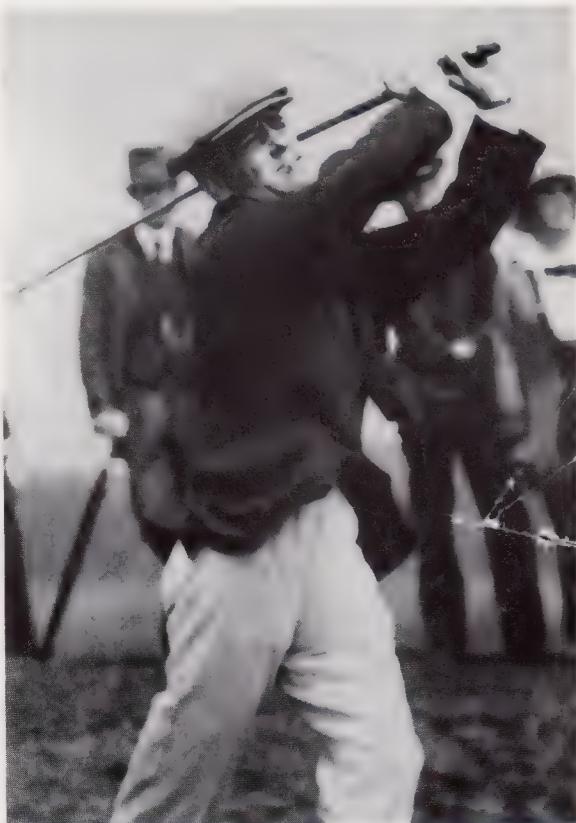
Just before being asked to write papers on "*Heroes of Old*" for American readers, Bernard Darwin had been down to Cooden in 1934 for long talks with Hilton.

"Mr. Hilton is not very strong nowadays, though

he is but sixty-five and save for a little putting he plays no more, but he is as eager, as keen and interested in all the young golfers (and no man was ever kinder to youngsters) as he ever was; he can see as quickly as he ever did what they do wrong and what they do right As the years go ruthlessly on and make dim the brightest records, I had better set out Mr. Hilton's victories. He won two British Open Championships, at Muirfield in 1892 and at Hoylake in 1897; and he was within a painful inch (it hurts me to think about it) of winning two more. He won four British Amateur Championships – 1900 (Sandwich), 1901 (St. Andrews), 1911 (Prestwick), 1913 (St. Andrews) – and he was thrice also beaten in the final. He won one American Amateur Championship, namely at Apawamis in 1911. The number of his lesser victories, especially in score play, is as that of the sands of the sea. Till Bobby Jones appeared, it might safely be said of him that Mr. Hilton was the greatest of all amateur score players."

The same paper contains a pearl of wisdom which the modern games player might ponder on. "In one of our talks the other day at Cooden, we were discussing the fighting qualities of various golfers and somebody said to him, 'You could fight pretty well too, couldn't you?'. His answer was one worth remembering. 'Sometimes – when I could see the humour of it all.'"

Having dwelt at pleasurable length on Harold Hilton, we must of necessity pass quickly over the other eminent Cooden golfers of the day. A county cricketer and an international at golf, W. Allan Powell was a member for forty years. He played in the famous Moles side which beat the full might of the American Walker Cup team at Woking in 1926. For those who joined the Club after the Second War he was something in the nature of a living legend. The brothers Rex and Lister Hartley were always at Cooden in those early days. Rex Hartley played in the Walker Cup match at St. George's Sandwich in 1930 and both played for Great Britain in the Walker Cup match at Brooklyn Massachusetts in 1932 – the only occasion on which brothers have played in the same Walker Cup match. These three and Geoffrey N. Foster won the Sussex Club Championship four times. Altogether Cooden won it six times between 1924 and 1930. Foster



Harold Hilton in play with the inevitable cigarette.



Left to right. G. N. Foster, Lister Hartley, Rex Hartley and W. Allan Powell.

as a quadruple blue at Oxford and one of seven brothers who all played cricket for Worcestershire so that the team became known as "Fostershire".

If these four were the first division, then the second division of Stewart Wyvol Thompson, A. D. Broughton and A. H. "Long John" Hollins were not far behind. *The Times* reported that in this part of the world Captain Thompson and Captain Hollins were reputed to be invincible. A. D. Broughton was well known for taking a hideously excessive number of waggles before each strike of the ball. It was rumoured that this was due to his having fallen out of an aeroplane during the war. On one occasion his playing partner found this so trying that he had smoked his packet of twenty cigarettes, which normally lasted a round, by the time he reached the 6th tee and had to send his caddy back for more.

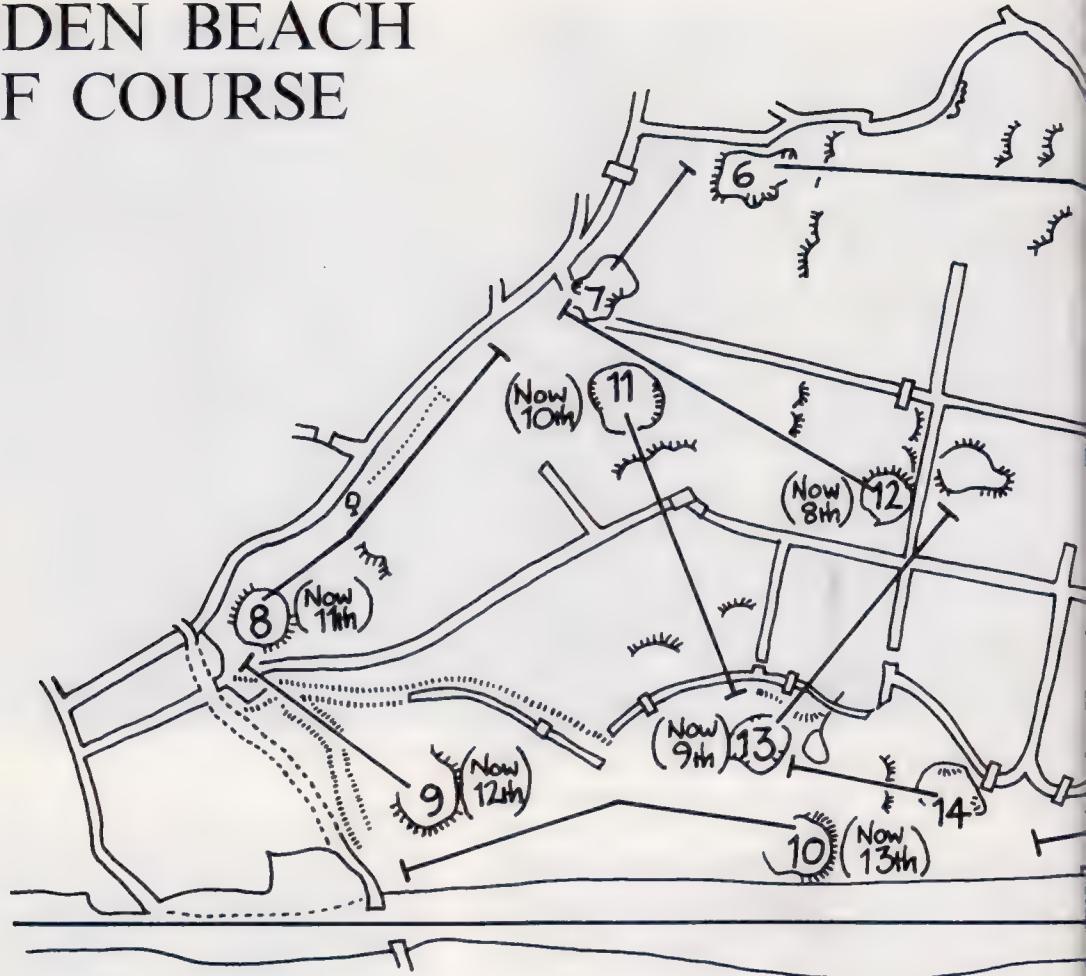
The finest example of how Cooden monopolised Sussex County golf is contained in the results of the Championship meeting held at Cooden in April 1928. The club team challenge prize was played for by teams of four over 36 holes. Rex and Lister Hartley, Allan Powell and G. N. Foster won with a total of 642 and the Cooden Beach second team, consisting of Thompson, Broughton and Hollins with E. G.

Spooner, totalled 645 and came second beating all the other Sussex clubs' first teams.² The success of the Cooden Beach players was reported as "phenomenal". Rex Hartley headed the qualifiers, five Cooden Beach men qualified out of the sixteen and none of them were beaten except by their clubmates. Lister Hartley beat Broughton by one hole in the final.

"Fashionable" was the word used to describe Cooden at this time and the Club had considerable cachet in West End Clubs and the Stock Exchange. Undoubtedly its convenience for the metropolis had a lot to do with it. Golf clubs near London were becoming increasingly busy at weekends and a motor journey was still a major adventure – punctures were frequent and radiators tended to boil over. A journey by rail from Victoria Station to Cooden Golf Halt was much less speculative. The Club deliberately sought national publicity and this initiative was helped by the Southern Section Qualifying Competition for the P.G.A. Daily Mail Tournament held in April 1921 and the English Ladies Amateur Championship which took place in October 1924.

All the great names – Abe Mitchell, Ted Ray, George Duncan, Harry Vardon, J. H. Taylor,

COODEN BEACH GOLF COURSE

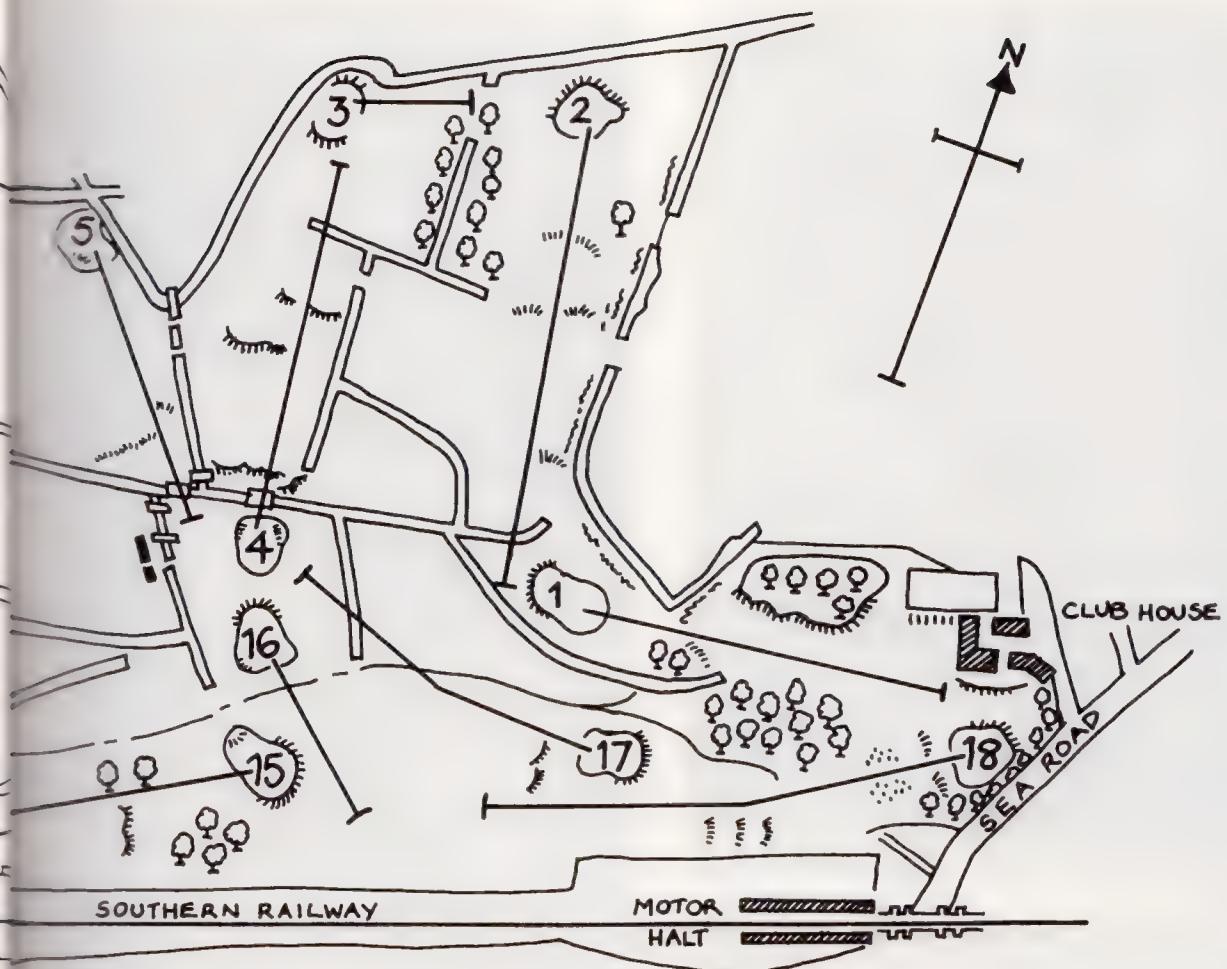


1934 CARD

Hole	Bogey	Yards	Hole	Bogey	Yards
1	5	450	10	4	374
2	5	473	11	5	455
3	3	145	12	5	429
4	4	378	13	4	348
5	4	304	14	3	153
6	5	450	15	5	436
7	3	163	16	3	148
8	5	402	17	5	436
9	3	170	18	5	466
		2935			3245
Bogey 76			TOTAL		

1987 CARD

Hole	Par	Yards	Hole	Par	Yards
1	4	441	10	5	477
2	5	476	11	4	401
3	3	159	12	3	178
4	4	360	13	4	408
5	4	314	14	3	190
6	4	413	15	5	485
7	3	175	16	3	164
8	5	481	17	4	432
9	4	357	18	5	500
		3176			3235
S.S.S. 71			TOTAL		



This sketch is based on the 1934 layout. The two new holes at the west end of the course by the level crossing were in operation, but the green at the 12th (now the 8th) hole was still short of the cross ditch. The 1934 card measured 6 inches diagonally so that it could be used to measure stymies. It was only when the balls lay within 6 inches of each other that the player could require his opponent's ball to be red.

Alex Herd, James Braid – took part in the professional tournament in 1921. Fred Robson went round in 71 in the afternoon to establish a new professional record for the course but his total of 148 was beaten by the Frenchman Arnaud Massy by one stroke. George Scott caddied for Massy but was not too pleased at being offered payment in French francs. When George protested, Massy presented him with his ticket for lunch in the Country Club – a reminder of the very different status of the professional golfer in those days. The amateur record, also 71, was set up by A. S. Gibb playing in the Scratch Medal in 1923.

In June 1924 Miss Cecil Leitch created the ladies record with 73 in the Ladies Open Meeting. Possibly she came down to have a look at the course before the Championship in the autumn. The English Ladies Championship, the only national championship ever played at Cooden, was preceded in those days by the L.G.U. County Finals and the whole meeting lasted a full week. Surrey, led by Miss Joyce Wethered, won the County Finals by the length of a street. Joyce Wethered beat Cecil Leitch in the quarter finals of the Championship itself and went on to beat Miss D. R. Fowler by 8 and 7 in the final. In accordance with custom, Joyce Wethered was then elected an honorary member and as Lady Heathcoat-Amory happily remains so to this day.

In this first decade after the First War the golfing community was still very close-knit and intimate. In the 1920s the professionals and the best amateurs still competed with each other on level terms and both the top professionals and the best amateurs played with the ordinary members much more frequently than they do today. Reference has been made to the all conquering Cooden teams at the Sussex Amateur



Joyce Wethered in the English Ladies Championship.



View looking north east from the 14th green, October 1924.

held at the Club in 1928. This was preceded by a match between the Sussex Amateurs and the Sussex Professionals. In the end, the Professionals won by 17½ matches to 16½ matches, but the Amateurs performed splendidly. Indeed they would probably have won but for the fact that Rex and Lister Hartley playing top in the foursomes had four stymies laid against them.

A leading professional like Fred Robson was able to play an active part in the life of his Club because the number of tournaments was strictly limited. As well as giving lessons and supervising club-making, Fred spent a deal of time playing with his members and also helping the handicapping committee and making suggestions to the greenkeeper.

In May 1926 Robson was elected an honorary member and in August of the same year Robson with Abe Mitchell, Ted Ray and Vardon gave a two day exhibition match, "the proceeds to go to the Bexhill Cottage Hospital Fund". On the second day the amateurs joined in the fun. Whilst Allan Powell and Foster were defeated by Robson and Vardon, the Hartley brothers halved their match with Abe Mitchell and Ted Ray.

Sunday the 27th May 1928 is a red-letter day in the history of Cooden Beach Golf Club. It was the occasion of the much heralded challenge match between Fred Robson and Walter Hagen who arrived by aeroplane (one of the few landings on the practice ground which have been authorised). Two days earlier Hagen had beaten Robson at Richmond, but at Cooden Fred had his revenge. There was never more than one hole in it. Robson won on the last green where the American took three putts. Robson, who was paid £30, was round in 67 and Hagen, who received £50, in 69. The match excited intense interest and was followed by over two thousand spectators.

Who were the members in those far off days of the 1920s? The allotment book for the membership shares contained a column for descriptions and therefore provides some answer. Of the men members in 1921 there were ninety who came under the category of Gentleman or Esquire. Members of the legal, medical and dental professions, the stock exchange, insurance brokers and underwriters totalled sixty-seven, officers in the armed forces thirty-four, and there were a total of forty-seven merchants, directors and manufacturers.

The remaining seventy included a sprinkling of bankers, schoolmasters, engineers, farmers, planters, three parsons, a couple of architects, journalists and estate agents, one shipowner, a



Hagen's flying visit to Cooden for the big match with Robson.

hotel proprietor, an actuary, a publisher, a wharfinger, an antique dealer, an artist and an actor Cyril Maude.

Three of the original directors in 1921 and most men of business called themselves merchants. With its connotation of wholesaling this was perfectly acceptable. Some of the entrepreneurs had made their money rapidly so enabling them to retire early.

185 ladies joined the new Club in 1921. It was only just becoming respectable for the daughters of gentlefolk to go out into the world and earn their living. Unfortunately whether any Cooden ladies did so cannot be told because (with the notable exception of one lady who is entered as "Mrs.") all the others are stated to be spinsters, married women or widows.

A goodly number of the members had lived their lives in the far flung outposts of the Empire. India in particular was well represented. Many years later in 1979 when the Royal Calcutta Golf Club celebrated its 150th anniversary, it was found that the senior surviving past Amateur Champion of India, Sir Henry Birkmyre (who

won in 1936), the senior Ladies Champion of India, Ruth Grant (1910) and the senior past Captain of Royal Calcutta, Hugh Waters (1947-48 and 1949-50), were all members of Cooden. Many members hailed from the Far East. The Bexhill Corporation was reputed to have advertised in the English newspaper circulating in Shanghai: "Retire to Bexhill and be with your friends."

By all accounts the members included some mighty strong-willed characters – not at all the sort to be found waiting patiently in queues. Autocratic and even domineering in their family and business lives as many of them undoubtedly were, most when at the Club were able to exercise a degree of tolerance so that it was but rarely necessary for the committee to intervene. One incident when all their tact was required involved Jack Howard, a past captain and himself a prominent member of the committee at the time. Howard was a local auctioneer and it was by no means unusual for people to attend his auctions solely for the fun of listening to his patter. In the fading light of an October Sunday afternoon Howard's four ball match refused a

request from the four behind to come through. On the right are extracts from the secretary's pompous but essentially conciliatory letter sent to Howard and his co-offenders. How the style of letter writing has changed. (The 12th and 13th holes referred to are today the 8th and 9th.)

The letters of apology were duly written. Howard attended the next committee meeting and all were placated.

A few words about the staff. Cooden has been particularly blessed in its head greenkeepers – only three in seventy-five years and the present incumbent, David Stephens, after twenty-seven years devoted and efficient service in that role is very much "not out". Harry Benge had been on the original green staff in 1912 and succeeded the first greenkeeper S. G. Saunders when he left for Walton Heath in 1922. Benge, who was very nearly eighty years of age when he retired in 1959, was described by the eminent golf architect C. K. Hutchinson as "one of the three best greenkeepers in England". David Stephens worked with Benge for eight years before taking over. This was just as well as at that time much vital information about the course such as the where-



The Indian connection. Sir Henry Birkmyre, Ruth Grant and Hugh Waters.

Dear Sir,

Letters from each member of the fourball consisting of Commanders White and Maund R.N. and Messrs. Fry and Dudgeon were received complaining that their request to pass through your fourball match was received without that courtesy and consideration which is expected between members of and visitors to the Club.

The Committee are fully aware of the momentary irritation caused by requests of this nature, particularly when the period for afternoon play is curtailed by failing light. They are also aware that a caddie, although instructed by his employer to ask the match in front in a courteous manner for permission to proceed, may through nervousness or ignorance assume a dictatorial mien.

The circumstances of this contretemps from your point of view were detailed in a letter to the Secretary from Mr J. Howard, and it would appear that the above mentioned conditions played a very large part, if not the only part, in initiating the unpleasantness with which this incident was surrounded.

Mr. Howard admitted that the fourball behind was travelling much faster than the fourball match in front, he also pointed out that the latter match was already commencing to play the 12th hole and that the players in front had only reached the cross bunkers at the 13th hole. Technically speaking, therefore, it may have been that there was not a completely clear hole between your match and the one in front.

It is pointed out, however, that the 12th hole is the longest on the course and that the spirit of the rule would have been better interpreted if permission to go through had been in fact accorded especially observing that the caddie's request included the plea that one or more of the members of the fourball were in a hurry to get back to London.

The Committee have thoroughly discussed and investigated the cases put before them and have come to the unanimous and definite conclusion that the request to go through was correctly made and should have been granted. The Committee have therefore tendered their apology to Commanders White and Maund and Messrs. Dudgeon and Fry.

Further the Committee consider that it would be a courteous action on your side if a personal letter was addressed to the Secretary confirming this apology to the above mentioned Gentlemen, the purport of which can be conveyed to them.

Finally the Committee wish to inform you that they are most concerned that such an incident should have occurred, and wish to emphasise the fact that a very serious view will be taken in future of any similar circumstances.

They also hope that in future the spirit as well as the letter of any rules issued from time to time may be observed in a thoroughly liberal manner.

abouts of the land drains was recorded nowhere except in Benge's head.

Between the wars it was a matter for comment for a player to carry his own clubs. The one-eyed caddymaster Sergeant Major W. Lawrence was a man of considerable influence. He bestowed the jobs and it was in his power to deprive the humble caddy of his livelihood. The charge for a caddy was 2/3d a round. The Club took 3d and out of the caddy's couple of bob he had to pay 7d a week towards his unemployment stamp. In the season up to forty travelling caddies would descend on Cooden and some were allowed to pitch tents and sleep on the right of the second hole.

Members did well to keep in favour with the Irish starter Jerry Nolan. Starting sheets were in operation from very early days, and woe betide the players who went on to the 1st tee before being summoned by Nolan. He not infrequently appeared to be inebriated. The more charitably disposed maintained that being a retired boxer he was merely punch drunk.

Inside the clubhouse the staff must have been falling over each other. In addition to the steward and the cook there would normally be three barbers, three waitresses (assisted by part-timers), a kitchen porter, a cleaner and a stoker.

One wonders how they filled up their days. Perhaps the answer lies in a minute of the house committee in 1935 which directed "the steward to arrange, if possible, that the lounge be dusted daily at about midday, after luncheon and before tea".

Early in 1928 the billiard room was built and this included "a new smoking room". This was in fact a small bar for the men with a very pleasant bay window and window seat. It was a most friendly corner for the member who came into the Club on his own. The Earl had provided £1,500 towards the cost of the new billiard room and smoking room and the rent paid by the Club was increased by £90 a year. The billiard room was further extended in 1931.

Since the grant of the lease in 1921, the directors had made at least two attempts to find the money in order to exercise the option to purchase the freehold but without success, and at the Annual Meeting in February 1929 the chairman had to tell the members that the option to purchase had expired.

Hitherto the Cooden Country Club had been included in the undertaking of the Golf Club. It was considered by the directors to be a financial liability and undoubtedly it was a worry to them. In September 1929 an agreement was signed



The clubhouse in the 1930s.

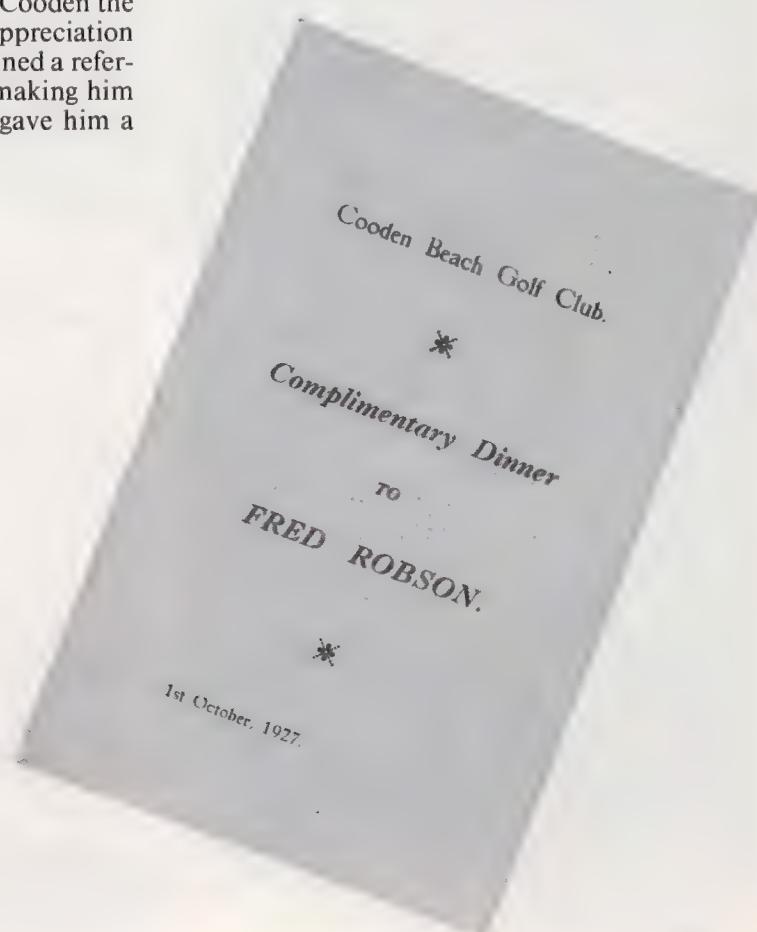
with Major Godfrey Lomer and Marshall Wood for them to take over the Country Club and shortly after this the Earl agreed that the premises of the Country Club should be taken out of the Club's lease. What is now the upper car park was not occupied by the Club until it was added to the lease in 1944. It was formerly known as the bowling green. There is no evidence that it was used for bowls, but certainly tennis was played there.

The association with the Club of the two men who in such widely different ways had done so much to promote it was now coming to an end. In May 1929 Mr. Bennett died and the Earl appointed Miss Blanche Ireland his nominee on the board in place of Mr. Bennett. At the next Annual General Meeting the chairman, still D. J. H. Cunnick, told the members that Mr. Bennett was "mainly responsible for the development of Cooden and it was on his initiative that the Cooden Beach Golf Club was formed".

At the end of 1930, Fred Robson, who had been so very closely identified with Cooden for eighteen years, resigned and moved to Addington Palace. In his last years at Cooden the members had shown their very real appreciation of him. The tributes invariably contained a reference to his kindness. In addition to making him an honorary member in 1926, they gave him a

complimentary dinner in October 1927 after he had tied for second place in the Open Championship at St. Andrews (won by Bobby Jones with his wonderful score of 285). The menu was typical of its time. It was not until 1931 that Club menus were written in English.

Fred Robson also tied for fourth place in the Open Championship in 1928 and again in 1930. He played in the unofficial international against the United States in 1926 and the first three Ryder Cup matches that followed it. There cannot be many who have succeeded so well in combining the roles of tournament player and club professional.





1. Such a handicap may have been unusual but it was in no way unheard of. In 1893 when they were both in their prime, Harold Hilton and John Ball each had a handicap of plus 9 at Hoylake. In 1921 the Royal and Ancient circularised all clubs seeking to put all handicaps on a uniform basis. At Cooden the handicapping committee asked Hilton, a member of the Championship committee, to advise. He fixed "the par of the course at 71, and that for handicapping purposes six strokes should be added." A handicap of scratch was therefore about right for Col. Bogeys. Modern commentators talk as if he were an 18 handicap player – this is a gross slur on the Colonel's immaculate steadiness.
2. E. G. Spooner's father, Philip, was one of the Club's great characters. Philip Spooner lost a leg in a car crash on the Pevensey Marsh road, but with great courage continued to play a pretty fair game of golf. The story is that he amputated his own leg before help came. Whether it is true or not does not matter – it shows the sort of chap he was.

VI ALL CONQUERING COODEN – THE LADIES

The reader may well ask how the story could have got thus far without mention of the Cooden ladies. It is a charge which is entirely justified. The only possible excuse can be that the triumphs of the Cooden men should be told first because they ended in 1930, whereas the illustrious achievements of the ladies continued throughout the entire inter-war period. The Cooden ladies won the Sussex Ladies Club Championship four times between 1920 and 1925 and a further six times in the 1930s.

In 1921 Miss Winifred Sarson, taught by Fred Robson, won the Girls Open Championship – the only “home grown” national Champion produced by Cooden – and she followed this victory by defeating the Boys Champion in a special challenge match at Walton Heath. They both played off the same tees and a win by the girl was not generally expected. In 1924 at the age of twenty-one Miss Sarson won the Sussex Championship defeating Norah Bradley another Cooden member in the final. Miss Sarson (now Mrs. Pearse) recalls that some of the more mature ladies were not too thrilled to see a win by this “chit of a girl”. The other star-turn lady golfer of those early years was Alex de Winton who won the Sussex Championship in 1926 and 1931 and was runner-up in 1928. Not the most stylish of players, she hit the ball a prodigious manly sort of blow. She was also the most intrepid of horsewomen. At the local point-to-point she was seen to take a fall two or three times, but each time she would re-mount and carry on. Nobody who met Alex de Winton will ever forget her. Whatever the occasion, her mode of dress remained unaltered – beret on top, cigarette in mouth and riding breeches for her nether garment. As a sop to convention for an evening function, she was known on rare occasions to wear a gown, but the writer can testify that the riding breeches were still there beneath it.

In the 1930s the Cooden team normally comprised Alex de Winton, Vera Jennings, Dora Smyth, Evaline Arnold, Connie Matthews, Ann Mackie, Evelyn Cronk and Rosemary Powell. In 1935 Cooden won both first and second divisions of the Sussex Club Championship. Ann Mackie played in both teams and won twelve matches out of twelve. Many years later when her son



Winifred Sarson.

The all conquering ladies team, 1935.



From left to right, Ann Mackie, Dora Smyth, Connie Matthews, Rosemary Powell (behind), Evaline Arnold (captain in front), Alex de Winton, Evelyn Cronk, Vera Jennings.

Patrick was a candidate for the committee, Connie Matthews was asked in the bridge room how long he had been a member. "I don't know about that" she replied, "but I do know that he had been round the course fifty times before he was born."

Rosemary Powell, daughter of W. Allan Powell, was very much the up and coming youngster in these years. In 1938 she was runner-up in the French Amateur Championship and in 1939 she achieved the first of her four wins in the Sussex Championship beating her Cooden colleague Vera Jennings in the final. Vera Jennings had only limited opportunity to play and it is a great achievement that her wonderful round of 69 which created a new ladies course record in 1939 should have stood for going on fifty years. No record of the ladies section at this time would be complete without mention of Miss C. W. Dewing, for many years their hard-working and popular secretary.

In 1931, ten years after he was first elected president at the tender age of twenty-one, the 9th Earl De La Warr further strengthened his ties with the Club by accepting an invitation to be captain. He had left Eton at the age of sixteen to enlist in the Royal Navy and caused a stir by attending the House of Lords in the bell-bottoms of an ordinary seaman. An idealist, he joined the Labour party and held junior office in Ramsay MacDonald's first Labour Government in 1923 (there were not many Labour Peers about in those days) and again in that of 1929-1931. In the economic crisis of 1931 he remained faithful to MacDonald. Later he served as Lord Privy Seal and President of the Board of Education. In 1945 he joined the Conservative party and held office as Postmaster General between 1951 and 1955. His involvement in national politics did not prevent the Earl from taking a keen, active and personal interest in the Club and indeed Bexhill generally. He held office as Bexhill's

youngest mayor and played a prominent part in the building of the Bexhill Hospital and the De La Warr Pavilion.

In the same year of 1931 the De La Warr family opened the Cooden Beach Hotel which had been converted from a row of shops. The Earl introduced people distinguished in all walks of life to the hotel and of course they included golfers. The most prominent of all was Ramsay MacDonald who took a golfing holiday at Cooden while Prime Minister. Other visitors included many who were famous in what is now called "the entertainment business"; among them were Ivor Novello, Gertrude Lawrence, Gladys Cooper (who had a golf lesson wearing shorts; presumably nobody had the nerve to reprove her) and Douglas Fairbanks Senior. Coming upon a snake on the golf course Fairbanks, using his mashie as a sword, disposed of it in the swashbuckling style for which he was famed on the screens of the world.

One particularly memorable legacy of the Earl's interest in the Club is the Alexander Grant Open Mixed Foursomes. The Earl came down to Bexhill specially on several occasions to attend meetings of the green committee and get the new competition under way. Whilst his intention that it should become a second Worplesdon Open Mixed Foursomes was not fulfilled, he inaugurated a competition with a specially happy atmosphere which has given a great deal of pleasure over the last fifty years. It seems likely that the Earl twisted the arm of Sir Alexander Grant to give the Challenge Cup.¹ Handicaps were limited to 18 for each pair. A very few days before the first competition in 1934, the green committee minutes record that "a special handicap of 24 to be allotted to Countess De La Warr for this meeting only". In fact the absurdity of such a concession was realised in time and the Countess and her partner Donovan played off 18. The Earl partnered by Miss K. Garnham beat Enid



The 9th Earl De La Warr.

Wilson and R. F. Garnham in the first round and went on to reach the semi-final. In those days the competition was a straight knockout with the final on the Monday – golf properly taking priority over work. For a number of years the final was played over 36 holes. The qualifying round was introduced in 1952.

In 1930 Michael Bingham from Stourbridge had been appointed to succeed Robson as professional. Bingham was famed for his long driving. He had the longest drive of 263 yards 1 inch at the long driving competition held in connection with the Open Championship in 1924. One of his first tasks was to assist the green committee with the design of the new 9th and 10th (now the 12th and 13th) holes. The short 12th hole originally had a sand bunker at the front on the right-hand side. This caused considerable controversy. Members' views were invited and it was filled in. These new holes were opened for play in April 1933.

Two months earlier, in February 1933, winter rules were introduced for the first time. Robin Robson confirms that until then members really did play the ball as it lay whatever the state of the ground. It is no wonder that the course was just about empty from November to March.

A. E. Edwards had been succeeded as secretary by H. Down in 1923. Brigadier General C. G. Pritchard took over from him and served until May 1936. During his nine years as secretary, the General enjoyed the respect and affection of the members and was a powerful influence for good. The General did a great deal to get the game of bridge established at Cooden – it was auction bridge initially, but it was no end of a job to find a suitable card room in the old clubhouse. The bridge players were relegated to some unlikely places such as the flat over the professional's shop and the cottage.

There was just one little upset during the General's term of office. In May 1934 the committee met without the General and two members complained that the secretary ought to be at the Club on Sundays. The General was obdurate: come what may he was not going to the Golf Club on Sundays. The reason is not hard to find. On the west wall of St. Mark's Church at Little Common there is a plaque in memory of "Brigadier General Clive G. Pritchard C.M.G., D.S.O. Churchwarden of this Parish for 22 years 1925–1947". The committee passed a unanimous vote of confidence in the General and they did have Lt. Col. S. R. G. Baker as an efficient assistant secretary, but one sus-

pects that it was never quite glad confident morning again for the dear General.

Captain L. M. Kerr followed the General as secretary but after only eighteen months he went to Muirfield. From 1937 to 1940 Captain Philip Simmons was the secretary. The 1930s saw a growth in the number of visiting Societies which were just coming into vogue. The Automobile Golfing Society have been coming since 1930 and always receive a warm welcome. Matches were played regularly against the other two local Bexhill Golf Clubs, Royal Eastbourne and the Ladies, and quite often against Piltdown and also the Sackville Artisans after their establishment in 1933. It was in the years before the Second War that the week-end matches, four rounds of foursomes played by teams of normally eight a side, really came into their own. The first of these to be established was the match against the Old Wellingtonians followed by matches against the Senior Golfers' Society, the prestigious Moles Golfing Society and the Oxford and Cambridge Golfing Society. These matches were the greatest fun for those who took part and brought many famous golfers to Cooden.

In April 1937 Michael Bingham left to go to Sunningdale and Jack Stait who had spent much of his career as a professional in Connecticut U.S.A. was appointed to succeed him.

The years immediately preceding the Second War were a time of much activity. Lt. Col. W. A. Hobbins who had come on to the board in 1934 and was captain in 1937 and 1938 seems to have been the prime mover in modernising the Club.

Outside on the course Major C. K. Hutchinson, the golf architect, was asked to advise. The directors flirted with the idea of altering the course so as to have two starting points near the clubhouse and also contemplated a possible additional nine hole course. In rejecting these proposals the board recommended that money would be better spent draining the course in order to make it more playable in the winter. In the end the Major prepared plans for tightening the existing course. Indeed all sorts of alterations had been authorised, including new greens for the 7th, 9th and 16th holes, when war intervened.

If it was little more than talk outside, it was all action inside the clubhouse. Following Col. Messer's death in 1934, Gunton and Gunton replaced Tubbs and Messer as the Club's architects. Extensive plans were prepared to reconstruct the interior accommodation "on extremely handsome lines". The main feature was the creation of the mixed lounge as we know it today



Cooden characters in the early 1930s.

(containing tubular furniture "of the latest design" with which the members made do for many, many years); the men's locker and changing rooms were moved to their present situation on the ground floor of the east wing with new kitchens and staff accommodation erected above. The contractors were Strange and Sons Ltd. who did all the work in the first three months of 1939.

Money was needed to pay for these improvements. The capital of the company had been increased in 1938 by the creation of 5,000 new management shares of £1 each. Of the 4,000 shares issued, 1,900 were taken by the Earl and the remaining 2,100 divided between twenty-two members. For all practical purposes this almost certainly gave the Earl control of the company. A new twenty-one year lease was negotiated at the same time; the rent was to be £775 for the first four years and then £800 for the remainder of the term.

This reopening of the clubhouse was celebrated by a reception for some four hundred members and guests – it must have been a tight

squeeze. Lt. Col. Hobbins, now chairman of the board, fell ill at the last moment and A. Turner Laing, the Club's vice president, made much of the fact that Earl De La Warr had hurried down from London to be present following a Cabinet meeting in the morning. Members were reminded that in a circular letter telling them what was to be done the directors had asserted that all would be completed by Good Friday 1939 and "opened on Good Friday it was".

Those present at the reception were told about the new lease, which had been sealed a fortnight before, and then urged by W. H. Cork to apply for £5 or £10 in debentures as he "wanted all members to feel they had a small stake in the Club". Many did as bid. A few subscribed as little as £3. The consequence was frustration in the secretary's office for years to come. It really was a confounded nuisance trying to send ten-pence (the half yearly interest on a £3 debenture less tax) to former members who in the turmoil of 1940 had left the district in a hurry and without trace.

1. Sir Alexander Grant, of McVitie and Price fame, was the friend and benefactor of Ramsay MacDonald, who was the first Prime Minister not to have a sufficiency of this world's goods and really needed help. For example, without the aid of Sir Alexander, the Prime Minister would have had to use public transport to go about London.

VII IN THE FRONT LINE

After the Second War started in September 1939 the population of Bexhill increased enormously. The R.A.F. Initial Training Wing was set up with its headquarters at the Sackville Hotel and the town was also a reception centre for evacuees from London. During the winter of 1939/40, the period of the so-called "phoney war", Bexhill boomed. The Golf Club also flourished and during these months thirty new members were elected.

The Commanding Officer of the R.A.F. Initial Training Wing was Air Commodore A. C. Critchley. He was no stranger to Cooden having commanded the Canadian Officers Training Unit and Trench Warfare School in the First War. These Canadians had been billeted at the

camp in Cooden and had trained where St. Augustine's Church now stands. Many distinguished games players were on Critchley's staff. Air Commodore and Mrs. Critchley (formerly Diana Fishwick), Squadron Leader and Mrs. John Beck, Wing Commander and Mrs. John S. F. Morrison, Flight Lieut. W. R. Hammond, Leonard Crawley and Pam Barton all played at Cooden in April 1940. On the 11th May 1940 the green committee decided that the match against the R.A.F. the previous Sunday had been so enjoyable that it should be made a monthly fixture. Within three weeks the British Expeditionary Force had been evacuated from Dunkirk in the armada of small boats and the British nation faced the gravest crisis in its history.



"Critch" with three champions, Pam Barton, Diana Critchley and Leonard Crawley, April 1940.

There was no more thought of golf. Suddenly Bexhill, apart from the military, was a ghost town. All those who did not have essential occupations to keep them in Bexhill were required to leave. Strenuous and immediate efforts were made to provide defences against the threatened invasion by Hitler – in fact had he crossed the water at that time there would have been precious little to have stopped his army landing and marching straight to London.

Anti-tank traps were constructed across the 18th hole. When completed, the officer in charge arrived and said that there had been a mistake somewhere along the line and that these should have been put in on the 18th hole of the Bexhill golf course.¹ The areas of the present 13th, 14th, 15th and 16th holes and the practice ground were wired and mined (later a golfer straying where he ought not to was killed by an exploding mine) and concrete pill-boxes were erected at the back of the 12th green and in the mound behind the 9th green. The artillery were deployed with heavy guns pointing out across the English Channel but with only two shells for each gun they could not waste one on a practice run. Stirring times indeed.

Golf at Cooden was confined to the first four holes plus the 17th and the second half of the 18th holes – and even then golf on the 1st and 2nd holes had to compete with soldiers playing football.



Dr. Andrew Murdoch², Enoch Horace Holme³ and several other Cooden worthies migrated to Highwoods, which kept its full course open throughout the war on a skeleton staff. The professional at Highwoods was R. W. McLean father of Bobby McLean and known to all as "Mac". Mac had been an assistant with Fred Robson at Cooden just after the First War, was a noted

club-maker and greatly beloved by all who knew him. Sometime about 1942 a visitor came to Highwoods, paid his green fee to Mac in the pro's shop and went out to play. He noticed the same little man in the tractor mowing the fairways and when he came in to the bar afterwards there was Mac in a white jacket serving up the beer. The visitor left thinking that Highwoods was indeed blessed to have someone on its staff of such energy and versatility, but he could not believe his eyes when shortly afterwards he was stopped at a roadblock by a uniformed Sergeant McLean M.M. of the Home Guard.

At Cooden the few golfers and some bridge-playing members kept the Club going. There were even a few competitions. When the war ended Harry Benge and his green staff had the toughest of tasks in front of them. Apart from the defence works previously described, large areas of the course had reverted to jungle with weeds in some places growing up to six feet high. Moles were causing havoc and thistles needed to be eradicated from the greens. In the opinion of Benge it would take one man ten years to clear the drains on the course after six years of neglect. On the initiative of W. T. M. Wright, who had done much to hold the Club together during the dark years, the green committee reconvened in October 1944 and set about the daunting task of repairs and reconstruction. Wright said that the ground staff would have to be greatly reduced compared with pre-war years and six good men should suffice.

In January 1945, without waiting for the end of the war in Europe, a start was made and the Bomb Disposal Squad blew up the pill-boxes. However the War Department Land Agent told the Club that whilst the golf course was on his list it could not be given priority over essential farm repairs elsewhere.

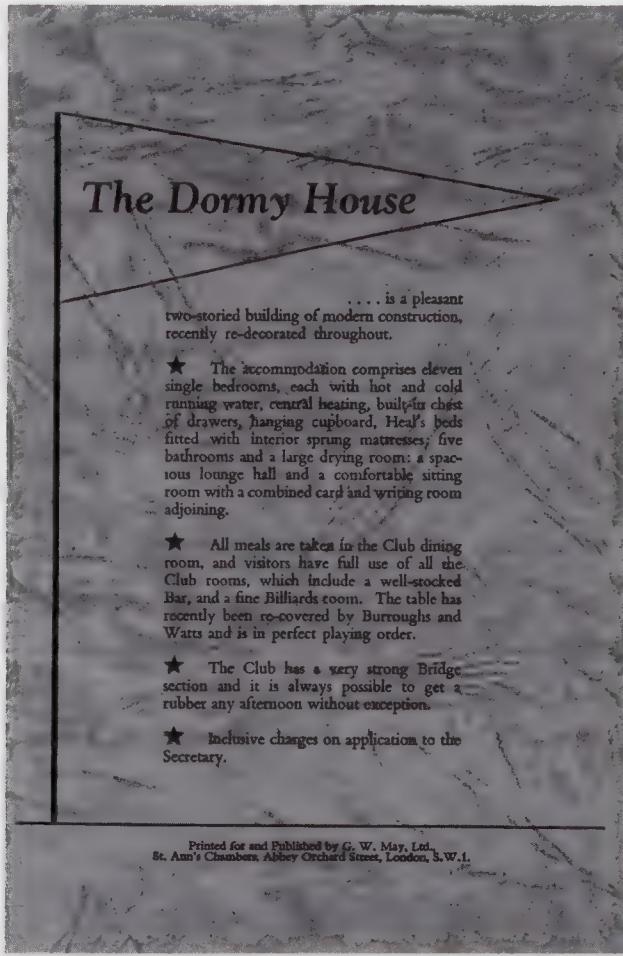
The 5th, 6th, 7th and 8th holes were back in use by April 1945. In July the green committee walked the course and agreed that the 14th and 15th greens would have to be completely re-turfed and later it was decided that the 9th, 12th and 13th greens would also need to be replaced entirely. Bomb craters had to be filled up and it is from this time that work started on eliminating unnecessary sand bunkers. Things were rapidly getting back to normal; in January 1946 there was a complaint about over-crowding in the bridge room on Thursday afternoons.

On the 13th April 1946 the committee met in an atmosphere of undiluted euphoria. It was reported that the entire course would be in play for Easter although the 15th hole was still not

very good. The committee resolved to advertise in the local paper and give notice to hotels and London clubs propounding the attractions of the Dormy House. The 1939 fixture list was to be resumed as far as possible. Getting all 18 holes into some sort of playing order so quickly was a considerable achievement.

By December 1945 the compensation to be paid to the Club for "rehabilitating derequisitioned ground" had been agreed with the military authorities and the directors in their

optimism expected the money to be paid forthwith. In March 1946 it was minuted that the War Damage Commission should be written to weekly and that they be informed that a question would be asked in the House of Commons if payment was not made. In fact a distinguished member of the Club, Sir Andrew Duncan, who had served in Churchill's wartime Cabinet, was asked to help and the money was forthcoming. Whether Sir Andrew really had anything to do with it will never be known.



1. After Dunkirk in 1940 Bexhill Golf Club closed. The four holes on Galley Hill were mined and the rest of the course between the railway and De La Warr Road was put under the plough.
2. Dr. Andrew Murdoch was the founder of the doctors' practice at 24 Albert Road, Bexhill, which was his home for many years. A good golfer, he was still striving well into old age to find "the eternal secret" of the golf swing.
3. Horace Holme was a wealthy bachelor who had a reputation for parsimony. This was perhaps unjustified as wherever he went he donated trophies for golf competitions. At Cooden he presented a cup for the ladies and the Veterans Prize for the men.

VIII THE OLD ORDER CHANGETH

The beginning and end of eras seldom coincide snugly with reigns of monarchs or other epoch-making events. At Cooden the first few years after the Second War had more in common with the inter-war years than the humdrum age which followed. The ladies carried on where they had left off in 1939. Between 1947 and 1956 they won the Sussex Ladies Club Championship no less than five times. Rosemary Powell (now Mrs. Dennler) won the Sussex Ladies Championship a further three times and she might well have had one more victory. In the 1948 Championship at Cooden Mrs. Dennler reached the final but fell ill overnight and had to give Mrs. Cleary a walk-over.

Valuable newcomers to the ladies team were Sybil Fleming from Troon, the sisters Muriel and Lilian Greer Robinson (they used to come over from Eastbourne in a splendidly sedate and mature Rolls Royce) and later Barbara Greer. Sybil Fleming was the gracious aristocrat. Dressed in tweeds, her labrador dog at heel, a walking stick in one hand and the other arm akimbo she gave every appearance of having stepped straight out of the pages of *Country Life*.

By comparison the men got off to a slow start – in the first post-war Scratch Medal in 1947 only two entrants handed in returns. Cyril Tolley who had long been a member and was now in his early fifties won this event for the next two years. The ever popular George Carter played when home on leave from the Far East. There were still many good players about and generally the standard of men's golf was pretty high.

The two day matches against the Moles, the Oxford and Cambridge Golfing Society, the Senior Golfers' Society and the Old Wellingtonians were resumed. Sir Dallas Brooks, Commandant General of the Royal Marines and later Governor of the Australian State of Victoria, brought down a Royal Navy team on several occasions.

The social activities of the Club seem to have been very full in these years. There was even talk of tea dances on Saturdays, but these would have been a trifle noisy for the bridge players. Until very recently bridge was one of the Club's main activities. The Club's "exclusiveness" remained undimmed. As late as January 1952 *The Tatler* devoted a full page to the Cooden Dance atten-



Cyril Tolley in his prime driving off the 5th tee.

ded by nearly two hundred and fifty guests. The short blurb which accompanied the photographs contained the woefully inaccurate statement that "the President Earl De la Warr was a past golf champion of India" – but never mind: Cooden was clearly top drawer.

The SOCIAL SIDE of GOLF-A DANCE NIGHT at COODEN BEACH GC, Sussex



From *Golf Monthly*, February 1952.

Nobody did more to preserve this image than Lionel Lord Tennyson, who was the poet's grandson. In sporting annals he will always be honoured for the courageous 63 runs which he made as captain of England batting with one hand against the Australian side of 1921. At Cooden he is remembered for his vivid personality. Writing the introduction to his book *Sticky Wickets* in the garden of the Cooden Beach Hotel in 1950, Tennyson acknowledged that he no longer belonged to the "idle rich" and indeed he was "broke", partly through an unjustified optimism that "racehorses would do what was expected of them". But cheerfulness kept breaking through. He added "I have my friends, I have my health and I have my optimism." In his book *The Complete Who's Who of Test Cricketers* Christopher Martin Jenkins says this about his Lordship: "He was a Regency figure and refused consistently to be trammelled by many of the considerations that bind most of humanity to a more prosaic existence". He made such an impact that it seems scarcely credible he was a member for only three years. It was typical of the man that although hopelessly impecunious he should have perpetuated his distinguished name by presenting the Club with a trophy.

Bobby Locke and Alf Padgham, both Open Champions, were two of the famous professional golfers who played in exhibition matches at this time. Evaline Jackson not only persuaded a number of distinguished lady champions to play in exhibition matches – Jessie Valentine, Wanda Morgan, Molly Wallis, Frances Stephens and Jean Donald were among them – it was also on her initiative that in 1950 the Australian ladies team on a two month tour of Britain and Ireland played the Sussex ladies at Cooden. The Australian girls won by ten matches to two but what a day it was for Mrs. Dennler "the tall easy-swinging local player who was the heroine of the encounter." In the morning, Mrs. Dennler beat the Australian runner-up and in the afternoon she played Miss Borthwick, the Australian champion. The match developed into "a thrill that will long be recounted in the annals of Sussex golf." Four down after seven holes Mrs. Dennler "spiritually encouraged by a polite but naturally partisan gallery" recovered to such good effect that she was one up after the 16th, but lost in the end at the 19th.

The men were not to be deprived of their share of the glory and in 1951 for the only time since the Second War, Cooden won the Sussex Club Championship. This was a 36 hole foursomes medal (surely the most difficult form of golf)

played at Goodwood and the Cooden pairs were Dr. I. G. B. Drybrough Smith and Robert Myer, Sir Henry Birkmyre and Ian MacDonald, and R. H. R. McGill and G. C. Burton. In this same year of 1951 the Sussex Amateur Championship was played at Cooden. Robert Myer reached the final. His time at Cooden was all too short. Myer, nicknamed "Jumbo" because he was a feather-weight, used with devastating effect a wooden putter with a loose weight which made a delightful "ping" each time the ball was struck. Geoffrey Burton set up the amateur record of 67 in 1949 and this was equalled by Henry Birkmyre two years later. Although since matched by Christopher Skinner it has never been beaten.¹ Ian Drybrough Smith won the first of his seven Scratch Medals in 1955 and was clearly the outstanding men's golfer at Cooden for the next decade. His total of 139 in 1955 (he did the 8th and 9th holes in a total of seven shots both morning and afternoon) is still the lowest winning score in the Scratch Medal.

1951 was the Club's annus mirabilis. At the Annual Meeting in November the captain, Forgan Grant, proudly announced that Cooden had provided the winner, Rosemary Dennler, and the runner-up, Lilian Greer Robinson, in the Sussex Ladies Championship, the runner-up, Robert Myer, in the Sussex Amateur and Cooden were also both the ladies and the men's Sussex Club Champions.

But whilst the golfers triumphed, the Club's finances were in a parlous state. Forgan Grant later revealed that at the start of his year of office several members, not over blessed with tact, had told him that he would be the last captain. At the Annual Meeting in November 1950 the chairman, Sir Henry Birkmyre, had warned members that "drastic action was necessary – the Club simply could not afford another year's loss." It was at this critical juncture in the Club's affairs that Major Courtenay Alison Weeks, known universally as "Mickey", arrived to take over as secretary from Captain Tom Sheffield R.N.²

All sorts of ideas were canvassed. The more extreme suggestions came from Major General Gordon Hyland. He considered that either the company must be wound up and the Club amalgamated with the hotel, or a regime of extreme austerity must be instituted – no catering except for teas, no Dormy House, no hot water for the changing rooms and no central heating.

Fortunately the board rejected these proposals. In Sir Henry's words "a programme of stark austerity would have meant destroying our great-

est asset – the goodwill and the reputation we had built up over years by our good service, our comfortable clubhouse and our traditions of friendliness and hospitality”.

Whilst stringent economies were nevertheless introduced, the Club advertised in an attempt to attract Societies, more visitors and more members. Most important of all, the members themselves – in 1951 there were only 110 full playing men members and 48 full playing lady members – vigorously set about the task of restoring the Club’s fortunes. Earl De La Warr waived part of his rent as he had done during the war. Some of the directors personally guaranteed the bank overdraft and for three years invited members to pay a voluntary levy, fearing that a rise in subscriptions could have the wrong effect. Within a month of the chairman first making this request, £660 had been given. Members and former members were invited to surrender debentures and preference shares and the response was magnificent.

Self-help was the order of the day. Dances, bring and buy sales and sweeps were organised and supported. Some members gave voluntarily of their time and skills whilst others made gifts in kind. Gordon Bishop provided all the Club’s printing free of charge and continued to do so for many years.

The old order was changing. Those who were not at retirement age now had to earn their living, money was scarce and labour expensive. A landmark in the history of the Club was the decision in March 1952 to end the appointment of a caddymaster. His duties were taken over by the professional. The difficult decision to discontinue the two day matches was made. Few members were able to take the whole weekend off to play golf and the cost of entertaining the visitors was a strain on the Club’s resources. This meant the end of the matches against the Moles and the Old Wellingtonians, but happily the matches against the Oxford and Cambridge Golfing Society and the Senior Golfers’ Society have continued as one day fixtures ever since.

Eventually things began to perk up again and plans for the future were laid. Once again a golf architect, this time G. K. Cotton, was called in to prepare a plan for alterations to the golf course in order to provide a second starting point near the clubhouse. The idea of a grass track for motors to the 10th tee met with general approval and in December 1953 £5 was spent on hiring a bulldozer to level this track.

In April 1954 it was reported that, while 30 members had died or resigned during the year, 59

members had been elected. This was considered very encouraging and the worst of the crisis was over. Great credit is due to Sir Henry Birkmyre for his staunch leadership in stormy times. He gave way in the chair to General Hyland in October 1953. At the same time St. John G. A. Sechiari and J. E. Hawkins were first elected to the board. These two, joined two years later by R. H. R. McGill, led the Club in the prolonged and vital negotiations with Earl De La Warr which resulted in the purchase of the freehold.

Before this John Sechiari tackled the Club’s management structure and he succeeded where so many before him had failed. Over the years many members had served on both the board of directors and the committee at the same time. In 1955 the board and the committee were merged, saving duplication of work, two sets of meetings and two sets of minutes.

It was at this time that the committee ventured into sheep farming. This was not an unqualified success and did not last long. One very good thing they did do in 1957 was to buy the second billiard table for £110 “fixed and delivered”.



The Club’s lease from Earl De La Warr was due to expire in 1959. The Earl having indicated that he might sell the freehold, a special meeting of members was held in June 1957. Although some influential members were convinced that it could not be done and no one knew what the price would be, the members present agreed that efforts should be made to buy. The committee’s task was not made any easier by the fact that the members included innumerable financial wizards who volunteered suggestions as to how best matters could be arranged, each one being quite different from the others.

Sir David Robertson, Member of Parliament

for Caithness and Sutherland and an enthusiastic member of the Club, smoothed the way by arranging a meeting with the Earl at his solicitor's office in July 1957. This was attended by Sir David, John Sechiari and Jack Hawkins. It was agreed that the property subject to the lease be sold to the Club for £24,000, the De La Warr Trustees leaving £16,000 on mortgage. The property comprised in the lease included not only the golf course, the clubhouse and other buildings inside the courtyard plus the Dormy House, but also Golf Lodge across the road, the cottage and the building land fronting Cooden Sea Road.

All seemed set fair, but the plan to buy quickly came to an abrupt halt when the Capital Issues Committee (it was a time of economic crisis) refused to allow the purchase money to be borrowed. At the time this appeared a tragedy, but in retrospect it may have been no bad thing as it gave the prime movers John Sechiari, Jack Hawkins and Robert McGill and the Club's solicitor, Colin Wood, more time to devise a satisfactory system for the new capital structure and control of the Club.

This was an awesome and complex task and one can have nothing but admiration for the way in which they tackled it. The avowed object of the changes was to ensure that control of the Club rested in the members and also that they owned all its assets. To achieve this, a new Club with a brand new set of rules and also a new company were required. The new company

called C.B.G.C. Limited (the initials being used to differentiate it from the two previous companies) was to hold the freehold. It would have two functions – to act as landlord to the Club and to borrow money from members in exchange for debentures. The fact that it was a company limited by guarantee cut out the tedious office work involved in issuing or transferring a share to each new member.

By October 1958 the Government's restrictions on borrowing had been relaxed. The Earl still preferred a sale rather than a new lease. The price was still to be £24,000 but an extra £4,000 was required to pay out the Earl and the other holders of management and preference shares in the old company.

John Sechiari arranged a loan of £28,000 with the Midland Bank so that the purchase could go forward and a special general meeting was called for the 24th January 1959 with the captain, Granville Coghlan, presiding. It was a somewhat confused meeting. At the end of it Sechiari felt – quite wrongly – that he had lost the members' confidence and resigned as chairman. Nevertheless, the committee's resolution that the new Club be formed was carried and the purchase went ahead. In less than a month 98 members had agreed to provide £9,660 in debentures.

The purchase of the freehold was completed on the 10th June 1959. The 9th Earl De La Warr had always been a good friend of the Club and this his last dealing with the Club was the most benevolent act of all.

1. The professional record is 65 by A. G. Harrison. Prominent in Sussex golf for many years, Arthur Harrison was the professional at Hill Barn, Worthing.
2. Muriel Austin was secretary during the Second War and E. B. Loveluck from October 1945 to November 1947 when he was succeeded by Captain Sheffield.

IX MODERN TIMES

Following the purchase of the freehold in 1959 there was much to be done and Jack Hawkins, the new chairman, was the right man to do it. Properties had to be sold to pay off the Midland Bank and the damage resulting from years of neglect to the clubhouse needed to be made good.

Jack Stait was nearing retirement. The faithful Ron Southall who had been assistant professional at Cooden since 1932 was appointed to succeed him and it was arranged that he should occupy the flat above the shop, so freeing Golf Lodge for sale.

Keen debate preceded the decision to convert the Dormy House into five flats. Four were to be sold and flat 3 was to be occupied by the secretary. There were many reasons for the decision to close the Dormy House. One of them was the increasing difficulty in finding staff to provide residents in the Dormy House with breakfast, luncheon and dinner. For years Mickey Weeks had helped out in the bar but to expect him to cook the eggs and bacon for breakfast (as he did on occasions) was too much to ask.

To reduce costs the conversion was carried out by the labour force of Jack Hawkins' own company. This was but one example of the many ways in which he provided the Club with material benefits over the years. Three flats were sold with no great difficulty but the small "bachelor" flat in the middle of the ground floor hung fire. Eventually Mrs. Heseltine expressed an interest. "The price is right, the accommodation is right and the location is right" she told the elated chairman of the Club's property committee only to dash his hopes a second later by adding "but there is one thing that puts me off." Mrs. Heseltine was worried because the flat was next door to a club: she feared disturbance by late night revellers and the banging of car doors. Her fears were quickly allayed and the sale went through.

By the end of 1962 the overdraft had nearly been paid off. The net profit on the sale of Golf Lodge and the four flats was £11,737. The Club still owned the secretary's flat and the cottage which was also sold shortly afterwards.

In this same year of 1962 the captain, that lovable Scottish doctor Jimmy Dick, presided over a successful Golden Jubilee meeting at

which Mr. Bennett's daughter presented the prizes. During his year as captain Jimmy Dick, helped by Brenda Arscott, started organised golf for the juniors. The committee commended this project to the members in these curious words: "The committee hope that members will encourage this venture and not consider the youngsters in the same way as some members do sheep or dogs that run in the bunkers." It was entirely appropriate that the first winner of the *Daily Telegraph* junior competition at Cooden should have been Stuart F. Robson, Fred's grandson.

"The committee hope that members will not consider the youngsters....."



..... in the same way as sheep or dogs that run in the bunkers."



In November 1963 Major Weeks retired as secretary. Certainly when Mickey Weeks left, the Club was in much better heart than when he came. So that his successor Major H. T. "Robbie" Roberts was fully briefed, Weeks prepared for him a copious book of notes on all

aspects of the Club's affairs. These make fascinating reading and show Weeks as a man of great kindness and practical wisdom. He described the ladies section as "very active and flourishing. They run everything themselves – they'll run you too if you aren't careful!"

Weeks must have had in mind Mrs. Evaline Jackson née Arnold who, as he rightly said, lived for the Club and County golf. She served on the board of directors from 1946 to 1959. Mrs. Jackson was lady captain on no less than fourteen occasions and also served as treasurer of the ladies section. The house committee on which she first served in 1933 and the bridge committee were her special interests and indeed she was still chairman of the bridge committee in 1975 – a span of service exceeding forty years.

Roberts was fortunate to have the help of Mrs. Orgill as cook. In addition to her culinary skills she certainly said and did all the right things and was most popular with the members. In discussing the arrangements for the captain's tea party Roberts suggested that it would make things easier to use plastic cups. Mrs. Orgill was horrified. The secretary sought to persuade her by pointing out that plastic cups were used at Buckingham Palace garden parties. "But, Major Roberts" she replied "this is Cooden Beach Golf Club." Her husband, a pensioner, was always seeking opportunities to help the Club, emphasising that he was used to responsibility having been charged with the duty of locking up the safes at the Home Office during the war. In emergencies Orgill assisted in the bar, but this did not work too well as he was very deaf and got the orders wrong. However, with his undoubted charm and his habit of addressing the male members as "Squire" nobody could be cross with him.

The committee were still toying with the idea of altering the course so as to provide two starting points near the clubhouse. A suggestion for a new clubhouse near the 9th green was quickly rejected on the ground that staff would not be able to get to the clubhouse from Cooden Sea Road. The scheme would have involved selling off land at the east end of the course for building. The fact that this would have upset members with houses in Cooden Sea Road and Clavering Walk might just have had something to do with the decision to reject the scheme. An important committee meeting was held in May 1964 with H. Victor Mole, who had succeeded Jack Hawkins, in the chair. It was decided that with a usable track to the 10th tee the course would be entirely adequate.

At the same meeting it was agreed that Peter Evenden be asked to prepare plans for the additional building which is still called "the men's smoke room". The men's bar was not at that time separated from the snooker room which meant that in the afternoons golfers had to talk in hushed whispers in a darkened room with the curtains drawn. Skinner and Reeves built the new room which cost £2,470 and was ready in time for the summer of 1965. Even allowing for inflation this was an extraordinarily good buy.

In October 1965 the bridge players for the first time elected their own committee. Until recent years bridge was immensely popular and formed an important part in the life of the Club. Partnership afternoons each Thursday were so well supported that frequently as many as six tables could not be accommodated in the bridge room. The overflow did not like going upstairs to the dining room and the problem of how to accommodate the excess occupied a great deal of the committee's attention. It was one for which they were never able to provide a solution entirely acceptable to the bridge players. In 1967 a plan to extend the bridge room was mooted but did not find favour.

In 1967 the Club were asked whether land could be made available for what is now the flourishing Cooden Beach Sports and Social Club in Withyham Road. Land in the area where the secretary's house now stands was offered, but the soil was not suitable for tennis courts. When told that the old putting course would make good tennis courts the committee declined to pursue the matter further; so ended almost certainly the last prospect of the Club broadening into a country club – whatever exactly that may mean.

The Club prospered in the second half of the 1960s. In August 1969 the house committee proudly recorded that "in the previous four years the following works and improvements have been carried out:

Men's Smoke Room added; Clubhouse completely rewired; washing and toilet facilities both Ladies' and Men's considerably improved; Staff flat enlarged; Staff rest room provided; woodworm treated; Trolley shed improved; and considerable repairs done to the Professional's building."

At the Annual Meeting in October, Victor Mole told the assembled members that the Club was in a "sound financial position with adequate cash to meet any foreseeable liability".

The saga of the secretary's house was to disturb this calm. It was a subject which probably created as much controversy as any in the

entire history of the Club. Late in 1968 the committee learnt that Roberts had received tempting offers from other golf clubs. Correctly interpreting the wishes of the members, the committee attempted to persuade him to stay at Cooden. This he agreed to do on the promise that the Club would provide him with a house to be built on land owned by the Club. There were all sorts of problems over Town Planning and the architect died in the middle of the job. In the end the house had to be larger than originally envisaged and cost a lot more money.

The simple point was that Roberts had altered his entire life on the assurance that a house would be built for him and failure to provide it would have been a breach of faith. The committee recommended that the house should be built and paid for partly by using the Club's cash resources and partly by debentures. At a lively Extraordinary General Meeting in January 1971 the committee had the worst of the debate but won the vote after the harassed chairman Victor Mole had refused John Sechiari's demand for a poll. The house which in the end cost £9,331 was occupied later that year and whatever its cosmetic defects it has certainly proved a good investment.

Other important decisions were taken in 1971. The committee were still contemplating all sorts of possible major projects. Bowls, croquet, a lift to the dining room and the concept of a country

club were all considered and rejected. The idea of two loops of nine holes was finally killed off and the decision taken to help players wishing to play a short round by making two new holes back to the clubhouse from the 4th green (called the Jubilee holes because they were opened for play in 1972, the Club's Diamond Jubilee year). It was also agreed that a fully automatic watering system should be installed. The cost was £11,598 and the work was carried out the following year by the Cameron Irrigation Company. It was not really quite such a momentous decision as it sounds because the previous watering system was in bad shape and had it been retained the best part of £5,000 would have had to be spent on repairing and replacing it. The installation of the automatic watering system has brought about a radical change in the nature of the Cooden putting greens which in earlier summers used to be slick and fast.

At the Annual General Meeting in October 1971, Victor Mole completed eight years as chairman and was elected president. Certainly a great deal had been achieved under his sound leadership. He was succeeded as chairman by Dr. Archibald H. Grace.

1972 saw the start of the WAMS. At the very end of 1971 approval was given to Dr. John Mackay's proposed Wednesday morning foursomes competition, a project which was to prosper so abundantly where previous attempts



The WAMS dinner in 1976.

to organise golfing "get togethers" had failed. In 1965 working members were encouraged to play golf informally on Wednesday evenings in the summer. This little frolic called "Mods and Rockers" for reasons which cannot now be recalled, packed up because the retired members joined in and started earlier and earlier, thus destroying the initial intention.

The Wednesday morning foursomes subsequently known as the WAMS were an immediate and unqualified success and within four months from the start a dinner had been arranged for the end of the season. John Mackay the gentle Scottish doctor was quickly joined as organiser by the strong-willed headmaster Harold Shanks and with their complementary talents they made a splendid team. Harold Shanks soon took everything on his shoulders: so much so that when he gave up running the WAMS in 1981 a committee of five were required to do his work. Each year now the WAMS have home and away matches with the FRAMS at Highwoods, the Ancient Royals at Eastbourne, the Tuesday Boys at Piltown, the Seaford Seniors and the Veterans of Willingdon and Eastbourne Downs. Unquestionably the influence of the WAMS has resulted in a more

relaxed, friendly atmosphere throughout the entire Club.

In 1973 the ladies team revived old glories by winning the Sussex Ladies Club Championship again. The semi-final and final played at Royal Eastbourne were both close-run affairs. Brenda Arscott playing top won twice at the 19th hole, playing the par 5 1st hole four times in the day in a total of 15 shots. Peggy Knight and Ineke Taylor won the Sussex Ladies Scratch Knockout Foursomes in 1976. Peggy Knight also twice won the Sussex Ladies Veterans Championship. Christopher Skinner and Grahame Cowlishaw won the Sussex Inter-Club Amateur and Professional Foursomes in 1978 and again in 1979, recalling the Club's five successive victories in 1925-1929. In 1979 the Cooden team led by Leslie Gray won the Sussex County Senior Inter-Club Foursomes for the Cyril Blake Cup.

Dr. Duncan Lawrie was the outstanding golfer at Cooden in the 1970s. Sadly his sojourn in Sussex was all too short. After his return to Scotland pride of place must go to Christopher Skinner who has now won the Scratch Medal seven times, the same number as Ian Drybrough Smith.

In domestic golf Christopher Skinner shares



Sussex Club Champions in 1973. From left to right (seated) Denise Welsted, Brenda Arscott, Billie Tingey (captain), Peggy Knight, Ineke Taylor; (standing) Mary Platt (reserve), Diana Martin, Joyce Hawes (reserve), Peggy Gillespie, Joan Haig.

with David Taylor the distinction of having won all of the Club's "big five" competitions – the Scratch Medal, the Captain's Prize, the All Comers' Knockout (the trophy for which was presented by Archie Grace and Eva Stroud in 1969) and the two autumn foursomes match play competitions. Alec Blakemore and Leslie Gray have won the Allan Powell Foursomes four times. David Taylor and his wife Ineke are the only pair to have won the Alexander Grant mixed foursomes three times.

Matches are still played against the Oxford and Cambridge Golfing Society, the Senior Golfer's Society, the Ladies and the Sackville Artisans. In 1975 the Bexhill Building Society presented a cup for the annual match with Highwoods: this has certainly made it a more keenly contested affair but so far Cooden has only won the cup twice. For many years now the season has ended with matches against the Old Leysians and the Sussex Martlets.

The Artisans built their own clubroom in 1972 with materials provided by the Club. Their members continue to compete for an abundance of trophies and celebrated their Golden Jubilee in 1983. The number of Artisans is limited to forty plus their two original and now honorary members George Scott and Bill Bossom.

In search of a new challenge Major Roberts left the Club at the end of 1974 to go to King's Lynn and be responsible for a brand new golf course and clubhouse. It has been said about Robbie that wherever he was there was laughter. Without in any way detracting from this delightful compliment, it has to be said that Robbie served the Club in times which were more serene than those enjoyed by either his predecessor or his successor, Donald E. Tack. For more than ten years (apart from a very well earned fishing expedition on Thursdays) Donald Tack devoted all his energy to the service of the Club and its well-being was in every way his paramount concern.

Don Tack became involved at once in the development of the land lying between the 18th hole and the railway station. This was a joint venture with British Rail as neither landowner could go it alone. It was agreed in March 1972 that the profits were to be shared equally and to protect the Club the access road was to be on the south side of the houses. However, it was not until more than four years later in September 1976 that the sale to Stoneleigh Developments was completed. The project was wholly beneficial to the Club. The scrubland on which the houses were built was of no use to golfers, the

houses shield from view much of the railway station and the Club collected a profit in the order of £18,000 before tax.

In 1977 Ron Southall retired as professional. The Club has had no more loyal servant. Southall first came as assistant to Michael Bingham in 1932. He belonged to a bygone age. Requests for payment of his always modest charges were made in apologetic tones. Accounts for his regular customers were kept in a little notebook – one page for each member. The debits and credits were written in pencil and when every now and again a settlement was reached a rubber was used to erase these entries so that a fresh start could be made. By way of pension a flat was purchased by the Club for his occupation. Grahame Cowlishaw was the professional from 1977 to 1982 when he went to Farnham and Keith Benson took over. During his time at Cooden Cowlishaw qualified for the Open Championship at St. George's. On the 1st tee Albert Dunlop, a keen Bexhill golfer, wished him well. An American overhearing this asked Albert: "Do you know that competitor?" "Certainly" replied Albert proudly, "I'm his hairdresser." "Geel!" said the American, "Does he bring his hairdresser to the Open?"

In 1979 a jolly dinner was held at which presentations were made to Dr. Archie Grace on his retirement as Chairman and to Robert Mortimore who was about to leave for Cornwall. Dr. Grace became President of the Club in 1986.

The years 1980–82 were in many ways unhappy ones for the Club. It was a time of roaring inflation and this bore particularly hardly on a Club where retired members predominate. A succession of wet summers meant that the course was already waterlogged before the onset of winter and in addition there were all sorts of problems with the catering. Instead of being grumpy some of the members rallied round and under the guidance of George Tingey gave of their time in decorating the Club rooms. Other good things emerged from this depression. The committee learnt its lesson: a catering franchise is not for Cooden. Much more important, the demand for better winter golf inspired Leslie Gray and Atherton Selby to produce a comprehensive programme for improving the drainage of the course over a period of years. Leslie Gray and William F. Jennings, whose knowledge of all things mechanical has been of inestimable value to the Club, supervised the execution of this programme. Without question this has resulted in much improved winter golf for Cooden members. The compensation paid by the Gas

Board for the main laid alongside the railway line helped to replenish the Club's coffers, so providing money to pay for these drainage works and partial reroofing of the clubhouse.

Inevitably and rightly the pace of change in a club is slower than in other institutions. Some will say the pace of change at Cooden has been too fast, whilst others would wish to speed it up. Whatever view is taken, the changes which have taken place in the 1980s have been dramatic: self service catering introduced, the smoke room opened to ladies, fourballs no longer absolutely taboo, ladies allowed in the snooker room on two mornings a week, the appearance at the captain's

barbecue started by Angus Shields of even the most staid members en déshabillé and last but by no means least candlelight suppers followed by bingo.

James Braid's "good sporting course" remains remarkably underused and uncluttered. The clubhouse retains its old world charm and the atmosphere is warm and friendly. Truly the members may count their blessings. Mr. Bennett as he ruminates in the peace of the Elysian fields might well conclude that Cooden Beach Golf Club combines the best of the old with the best of the new.



The 1987 Captains, Bill McBrien and Betty Storkey at their drive in.

COODEN BEACH GOLF CLUB CAPTAINS	
1921	H. G. COGHLAN
1922	W. W. BRUCE
1923	A. S. GIBBS
1924	J. ELLIS YOUNG
1925	H. J. HOWARD
1926	S. WYVOL THOMPSON
1927	S. WYVOL THOMPSON
1928	H. G. COGHLAN
1929	A. H. HOLLINS
1930	A. H. HOLLINS
1931	EARL DE LA WARR
1932	J. C. M. LOWE
1933	J. C. M. LOWE
1934	H. G. COGHLAN
1935	A. R. AITKEN
1936	A. R. AITKEN
1937	W. A. HOBIBNS
1938	W. A. HOBIBNS
1939	S. DURBAN SHEARING
1940	S. DURBAN SHEARING
1941	A. KELT
1942	C. A. M. SAREL
1943	K. R. COULLIE
1944	K. R. COULLIE
1945	W. T. M. WRIGHT
1946	R. H. KERSEY
1947	R. H. KERSEY
1948	C. A. M. SAREL
1949	W. A. POWELL
1950	W. A. POWELL
1951	J. FORGAN GRANT
1952	H. GORDON FERGUSON
1953	E. C. KELIHER
1954	J. E. HAWKINS
1955	J. E. HAWKINS
1956	A. HOWIE
1957	I. M. CHISHOLM
1958	R. H. R. MCGILL
1959	G. B. COGHLAN
1960	H. V. MOLE
1961	H. V. MOLE
1962	J. H. DICK
1963	D. N. WILSON
1964	W. F. WALTON
1965	A. KELT
1966	L. F. DAY
1967	W. C. HOUSTON
1968	S. J. G. A. SECHIARI
1969	A. H. GRACE
1970	J. H. NORRIS
1971	E. A. PATERSON
1972	M. F. HICKMAN
1973	W. E. W. MITCHELL
1974	G. J. BISHOP
1975	A. J. ARSCOTT
1976	R. A. MORTIMORE
1977	P. C. MATTHEWS
1978	D. H. V. THOMAS
1979	F. F. KENNEDY
1980	J. MERVYN JONES
1981	R. EDGE
1982	A. G. SHIELDS
1983	D. C. TAYLOR
1984	J. H. GRAY
1985	Dr. N. C. R. W. REID
1986	H. B. LANGLANDS
1987	W. R. MCBRIEN

Photos by Derek Casper.

